Apex Predator

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Class 1-A & Midoriya Izuku, Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead & Midoriya Izuku, Midoriya Izuku & Yagi Toshinori | All Might, Midoriya Izuku & Shigaraki Tomura | Shimura Tenko, Iida Tenya & Midoriya Izuku & Todoroki Shouto & Uraraka Ochako & Yaoyorozu Momo, League of Villains & Midoriya Izuku, League of Villains & Takami Keigo | Hawks, Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead & Takami Keigo | Hawks & Yamada Hizashi | Present Mic, Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead & Toga Himiko

Character:
Midoriya Izuku, Class 1-A (My Hero Academia), Class 1-B (My Hero Academia), Uraraka Ochako, Ashido Mina, Jirou Kyouka, Yaoyorozu Momo, Hagakure Tooru, Hatsume Mei, Asui Tsuyu, Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead, Yagi Toshinori | All Might, Yamada Hizashi | Present Mic, Nedzu (My Hero Academia), Kayama Nemuri | Midnight, Toogata Mirio, Amajiki Tamaki, Kanata Nejiro, Takami Keigo | Hawks, Tokoyami Fumikage, Shinsou Hitoshi, Shigaraki Tomura | Shimura Tenko, League of Villains (My Hero Academia), Monoma Neito, Dabi (My Hero Academia), Todoroki Touya, Sako Atsuhiro | Mr. Compress, Kurogiri (My Hero Academia), Toga Himiko

Additional Tags:
BAMF Midoriya Izuku, Analytical Midoriya Izuku, Protective Midoriya Izuku, Midoriya Izuku Has Trust Issues, Shinsou Hitoshi Replaces Mineta Minoru, Parental Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead, Parental Yagi Toshinori | All Might, BAMF Uraraka Ochako, Dabi is

Todoroki Touya, Good Sibling Dabi (My Hero Academia), Protective Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead, Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead Adopts Shinsou Hitoshi, Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead Adopts Eri, Older Sibling Toogata Mirio, Minor Jirou Kyouka/Yaoyorozu Momo, Minor Asui Tsuyu/Uraraka Ochako, Minor Dabi/Takami Keigo | Hawks, Minor Midoriya Izuku/Todoroki Shouto, Bakugou Katsuki Faces Consequences, Class 1-A as Family (My Hero Academia), Minor Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead/Yamada Hizashi | Present Mic, Minor Todoroki Fuyumi/Usagiyama Rumi | Miruko, Takami Keigo | Hawks Acts Like a Bird, Bakugou Katsuki Redemption, League of Villains as Family (My Hero Academia), Moral Ambiguity, Shimura Nana is Midoriya Inko's Parent, Todoroki Enji | Endeavor's Bad Parenting, Parental Sako Atsuhiro | Mr. Compress, Parental Kurogiri (My Hero Academia), Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead Adopts Toga Himiko, Midoriya Inko Adopts Shigaraki Tomura | Shimura Tenko, Everyone Has Issues, Sensei | All For One's Bad Parenting, Yagi Toshinori | All Might Adopts Midoriya Izuku, Shimura Hana Lives, Minor Monoma Neito/Shinsou Hitoshi

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Collections:
Good Fucking BNHA Fics, midoriya the madlad, Astral_Phoenix108's Library, The Witch's Woods, BnHouse, Adored By Digitalta's Digital Citizens, zo’s best fics to know & share, Midoriya Izuku Is Terrifying, Mine favoritter., Hainako's Collection of amazing fanfiction, BNHA Rereadables 📖, Typsy's Dragon Hoard, FTTN's Favorites, Genius bnha fanfics, Don't Mess with Dadzawa, its-yaboijojo Read Later/Favorites, Certified Good Shit™, "no writing academia" discord recs, Storycatchers' pile of heroic hero stuff, Mixed_Fics, 僕のヒーローアカデミア - (読み返す [よみかえす]), Got 99 problems but these ain't one, There are no words for this beauty, Fav_Fics_TQ, Creative Chaos Discord Recs, Bnha fics that keep me from sleeping, Best of BNHA, Best of our resident gremlins✧, Fics which radiate chaos, Make Me Cy rip out my heart, Stories That Deserve More, Bamf midori, Morally Grey OP Izuku, ☆ Little Red's BNHA Library ☆, Fanfiction Masterpieces, Mealynn's fav fanfics, Ding ding ding we have a winner, DerangedDeceiver's Favorite Fics, the perfect fic doesn't exi-, G.O.A.T. Fics, fics I want to read soon tsukkikay, bnha fics i dream about 🌙, Gimme a BAMF!, Unpleasant's MHA Recommendations, Best Fics that I had the

Motivation to Start and Finish in a Day, One For All For All, Mellow's Five Star Fics, Void's BNHA Favorites :D, In-Progress I Want To Read, The Abyss Records, FreakingAmazingFavorites, to be read boku no hero fics, Justice for Izuku the Broccoli Boi, bnha dekuism, I've given my heart and soul for this fic, Lex's Favorite BNHA Fics ٩(●ˇ▿ˇ●)۶, The gold standard of My Hero Academia fics., Quality Fics, Fave Fics Found, absolute best picks, Fics to read over and over, 📚 Fanfic Forum Discord Recs, Purple Archivist: Read and Read Again, thiccboimork's reading list, SweetUmber's Fave BNHA Fics, Pthaloteal, A Picky Vest's Favorites, Unfinished Books, plz plz plz read these masterpieces so we can rant and be friends, Behold the Sacred Texts, Ashes' Library, Geisha's Collection of Wonderful Reads, Hero Academy, BNHA Fics *chef's kiss* 💯 💯 💯, BaNHAmmer, FanFic_Reading_Queue9, Vaguely Organized Crime Fics, The Goodest Shit™, BNHA, Leannic Recs, Best BNHA Fics, Long Fics That I Love To See Updated, my hero academia fics!!, mort's bnha favorites!!, MHA_fanfics_because_idk, Good Stories to Pass Time, unhinged and its 2am? perf mha fics for u, SakurAlpha's Fic Rec of Pure how did you create this you amazing bean, mha, BNHA_Incomplete_Fics, 10/10 would re-read bnha, T.S.S (This shit slaps), 👌 good shit, Elvie's favourites, mha fics, BNHA Hall of Fame, Stalker's Amongst Stalker's, Navadi's favorite fics, AnoditeOmniaAbuzz, hereBeGems, Eatbook's Cherished and wanting more All Fandoms, A_Listers, Discord Fics From Network Error, MHA, mcyt fics that lengthen my life, fanfics that make me froth in the mouth [but in a good way], Identity crack !?! that save my soul (these stories that cure my depression), Pomarac's All Time Faves < 3, i can't fit them all in their own place so i needa cram them in here, Boku no hero academia, The Reasons For My Insomnia, BEST MHA FICS TO EVER BE MADE 🧢, То что нравится, Bnha fanfic who has my heart, mha fics that are my will to live, rae keeping track of her BNHA fics?!??!? woah, Peonybud's list to read asap, Jaded Discord Server Recommendations, BNHA, fics i would download again and again, my heart is here, Ongoing Fics (bnha), The Cream of the Crop, BNHAHappyFunFics

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Apex Predator

by silver jackdaw (cizzi)

Summary

Every single school had one: someone at the top of the food chain. An acme. Someone who could do things under a teacher's nose, escape consequences, and terrify other people. Someone who looked down on everyone else like they were prey. An apex predator. And Izuku couldn't count on teachers and adults to protect anyone. Even a hero school wasn't safe from the phenomena. When Izuku gets to Yuuei, he's determined to find out who it is and ensure they can't hurt him or his new friends.

...and accidentally, in the process, becomes the apex predator (though he is mostly unaware of this, and uses it for good. But still, people are terrified of him.)

(Or, a snowball chain of events wherein Izuku's paranoia leads to 1A becoming a family, everyone in school being in debt to him, Aizawa adopting everyone in his sight and slowly growing closer to committing acts of arson, the League gaining redemption and working with the resident Apex Predator to combat the Hero Commission whilst gaining technically legal identities, and Hawks finding a family. Hurt people help other hurt people, and they're all doing their best. Some laws may or may not be broken in the process.)

Don't Be Fooled by the Pink

Something Izuku had learned, the very hard way, was that there would always be someone who tried to put their boot on his throat.

He lived for years in fear of doing or saying something that would set Bakugou off, after all. Deep down, he didn't *really* hate the other boy, but he would have appreciated an apology, or something. But instead, the boy just screamed something mostly coherent at him after the sludge villain incident and then proceeded to avoid him.

Yeah, real heartfelt.

There was something that felt a little different in their dynamic after that. Still, Bakugou- Kacchan- had always been that someone. A lion stalking its prey and playing with its food. An apex predator.

Izuku liked to think he had an upbeat view on life and didn't hold a grudge (even if he did have some journals left from when he was younger that mentioned ripping Kacchan's legs off and sending him spiders in the mail...) but he was still realistic. Just because he'd gotten into Yuuei didn't mean he would escape the hell that middle school had been. After all, he was sure there were people like Bakugou there. Now, Bakugou, he hadn't been the apex predator on purpose. Sure, he bullied on purpose, but he didn't even fully realize the power he wielded- he just had an ego, he was just on top because of his Quirk, he didn't go out of his way to prey on everyone in their school (well, other than when he spotted Izuku and harassed him). Izuku heard stories from his friends online, the ones he played games and had a server for their multiplayer online games with, and the stories were always the same. Bullies were everywhere. And sure, heroes were great- Izuku loved heroes!- but he also wasn't stupid. There were a lot of heroes- *too many*- that were bullies. Not all heroes were good people like All Might or went out of their way to create programs to help their communities like Ingenium or donated most of their pay to charity like Present Mic. A school like Yuuei, even with its shining reputation, surely had bullies.

Surely had an apex predator.

And it was probably someone who was smart about it, since they'd gotten into Yuuei. That meant Izuku would have to spot them first. He would have to act first, to protect himself and avoid them, to make sure high school wasn't as terrible as middle school was (and make

sure Kacchan didn't get into a fight with any bullies and accidentally blow them up. Or get blown up himself. There might be someone with a better explosion Quirk out there.)

It wasn't something he told anyone about or talked about. Why would he? It would only spread, slowly, and draw attention to him, because people let little things slip accidentally even if they didn't mean to. But from the first day, he was making mental notes and cataloguing his new classmates' personalities and abilities. He would mark one Iida Tenya down as *authoritarian- hostile?* to later change it to a good friend in his book. He took stock of the friendly girl he'd saved in the entrance exam who caught him, much to his embarrassment, and thought she might be a good friend. He was actually thrilled that their teacher decided to do a Quirk test first (well, that was bad for him, but good for analyzing everyone else) and it allowed him to get a look at what everyone could do.

(On that note, he wasn't too sure about Aizawa-sensei at first- the man did kind of intimidate him in front of everyone- but he got the point of it after. It would be pretty stupid if he broke his arms every single time he tried to help someone. He would never survive. And the man was probably operating under the assumption Izuku had had his Quirk for almost eleven years, so he hadn't bothered learning to control it.)

...and he did stop Bakugou from running at him. No one had ever done that before. Izuku did make a small mental note that maybe his homeroom teacher wouldn't turn out to be too bad.

Maybe. Izuku would keep an eye on him.

His notebooks simply wouldn't cut it. Not for the entire school. He did keep one select notebook for Class 1A, but delegated the rest of the hero courses to a binder, and the same for support and general studies. He'd started a habit of skulking around during lunch- going unnoticed, as usual, because he was very good at that after going through middle school with Kacchan- taking note of the loudest people and anyone who looked aggressive or people avoided. He ended up seeing some fairly interesting personalities, but nothing too bad yet.

But he was sure he'd find something. There was always a king- a ringleader- a queen bee- an apex predator. Izuku had made a few pretty good friends so far, and he wouldn't let their years at Yuuei be ruined by anyone- not while he was around!

"Midoriya, stay a minute. I just have a note on your essay."

Izuku looked up in surprise but stayed at his desk while his classmates filed out around him, not looking particularly concerned. A note on his essay was probably to be expected. It was...ten pages longer than their assigned page limit. He couldn't help it! Aizawa had given them such a broad topic about hero society, Izuku couldn't just shave off so much vital information...

When the door slid shut, Aizawa stepped out from behind his podium, pinched his nose, and sighed, closing his eyes like he was dreading what he was about to say. Izuku suddenly wondered if this was about more than his essay.

The man walked over to his desk, then, unexpectedly, dropped into a crouch so he could look him in the eyes. Izuku couldn't help but stiffen, which he was sure the teacher noticed, and he wondered again what this was about.

"I don't have a note on your essay," Aizawa told him, bluntly, and Izuku had to give him points for honesty. His usual dead-looking eyes bore into his with a flat intensity. "I just didn't want you to panic. You aren't in trouble."

Okay...

"I reviewed the footage from battle training the other day. You handled Bakugou's Quirk quite cleverly."

Cleverly meant that Izuku knew exactly how to push Kacchan's buttons, and had baited him into wasting time while Izuku ran away from him- something he had way too much experience in- and then tricked him into blowing up the ceiling to destabilize the floor so Uraraka could get the fake bomb.

From what he'd heard, Ochako had been just as clever in getting Tenya to let his guard down. The cute pink costume shouldn't be underestimated, in Izuku's opinion. The girl was smart.

"I want to know why you didn't use yours."

Izuku cringed. There it was. "Because it breaks my bones?" he offered, a little pathetically, garnering only Aizawa's unimpressed gaze. "Um, well, I'm not...very used to it yet, sensei, so..."

Aizawa's eyes narrowed. "You aren't used to it? Didn't you develop it

any before entering Yuuei?"

"Um...not...really? I'm, uh, a late bloomer, you see, so I didn't uh...get it when I was four, like you usually do."

Izuku got more uncomfortable when Aizawa tilted his head, like he was examining him. "All right, so you got it at what, eight? Nine? Did you do any training?"

"Er...no, sensei." Struggling not to grab at his neck, where it felt like bugs were crawling up his back- he hadn't talked to a teacher this long in, well...forever- Izuku tried not to mumble out his next words. "I uh...got it this year..."

Aizawa froze. His eyes widened, which was a testament to how surprised he must have been. He didn't seem like someone who would be surprised easily. "This year? ...When, exactly?"

"Uh...entrance exam day."

Izuku cringed when Aizawa's eyes widened further. He was trying so hard not to tell the whole truth, but not to lie either, but there was no easy way around this. "Excuse me?" the man demanded, like he was personally offended. "You got it that late?"

"I-I know it's rare, but there are actually three documented cases-" Izuku immediately started to stammer.

Aizawa held up a hand, silencing him. He raised his other hand to rub at his eyes. "For fuck's sake," he mumbled under his breath, then seemed to remember a freshman was in front of him and looked up with a sigh. "Midoriya, I apologize. I assumed you neglected training your Quirk until so late out of either naivety or arrogance, an assumption that made less and less sense every day I've spent with you, which is why I decided to ask you this."

Izuku stared at him in frozen amazement. A teacher- apologizing to him? When he hadn't even really done anything that extreme?

"The entrance exam is unfairly stilted towards those with strength and combat-oriented Quirks, even though there are plenty of heroes without such Quirks, such as myself. With yours, you would have seen just that privilege, if you had actually a chance to learn to use it."

Izuku tried to connect the dots in his head. What did this mean, then? Now that Aizawa knew he was such a...newbie? "S-so am I gonna be

expelled?" he forced himself to ask, wincing.

Aizawa frowned. "Of course not," he replied, noting the way his student flinched when he moved his hand to rest on the desk. "But I will have to alter how I teach you."

"I-I'm not going to be removed from class, right?"

Always assumes the worst, but especially if it's from me, Aizawa thought to himself. He may not have been as experienced with kids as Hizashi or Nemuri, but he wasn't dumb. He made a note that he would need to be careful in how he spoke and moved. Midoriya seemed excessively nervous of authority figures, which could have been just an offshoot of his regular anxiety, but could have darker origins than he knew. "No. I'll just need to make a schedule to spar with you one-on-one. Your Quirk is obviously dependent on the strength of your body, and we can discuss it in further detail later."

The boy visibly deflated in relief. Seriously, what was his deal?

"R-really, sensei?" he smiled, almost hesitantly. "I mean, you don't have to-"

"I don't *have* to, but I'm going to," Aizawa interrupted dryly. "I'm your teacher, Midoriya. It's my job to monitor your progress and help you. I meant it when I said you have potential, and I'll do everything I can to help you reach that potential."

Midoriya's jaw clicked shut. He looked like he was about to start crying, for a moment, then smiled again, wider and yet more like glass. "Th...thanks, sensei! I promise I'll give it my all!"

"I don't doubt that. Just don't give it your all so much you break more bones."

Izuku had a sheet dedicated to the teachers- separate from their individual pages, of course; this one had a five-star ranking system for how trustworthy he thought they would be. Obviously, All Might had a star beside his name. No one else had any stars yet, partially due to the fact he hadn't gotten to know them yet, partially because some of them kind of scared the shit out of him (did Snipe ever take his mask off?)

That night, however, he went home and hesitantly stared at the page for a few minutes before scribbling in a star by Aizawa's name. He had

always dreamed of getting to meet Eraserhead, though he was also a little afraid of what the man would be like in person, but maybe...he would be trustworthy.

Maybe he would even listen if Izuku told him about any bullies.

"Izuku!" Ochako cried the next day, after he'd told her he didn't actually like the name Deku that much, even if she had given a new meaning to it, and Izuku had suggested they just use each other's first names for now, "I love your hair pin!"

Izuku smiled, embarrassed. His hair was particularly crazy that day, and some strands had stubbornly refused to stop flopping in front of his face, and he'd known it would be a problem in class, so he'd used one of his mother's hair clips to hold it back. It was in the shape of a pretty pink lily like the ones Inko kept in their windowsill in the living room. "Th- thanks, Ochako," he replied, still getting used to using her name. "It's actually my mom's, but, uh..."

"That's nothing to be embarrassed about, my friend!" Tenya practically yelled into his ear, waving an arm enthusiastically. "I think it rather suits you. It matches Ura- I mean to say, Ochako's hair tie!"

Ochako giggled. "It does!" she said, looping an arm through Izuku's, making him jump and gulp, face warming. She quickened their pace. "Come on, let's hustle before we're late!"

Izuku wondered if this was what having friends was like, as they dragged him through the hall towards class. If it was, it was rather nice, and it made him even more determined to make sure no bullies made his friends unhappy.

Not Playing Dolls

Izuku had gained a lot of online friends through the games he picked. It was too simple to say, however, that he found others with useful skills just "through games;" he would inevitably start up conversations and enter servers with others and talk about everything from Quirks to who had the best cinnabons in town. As he hashed his way through the internet, he inevitably came across a few people who hacked their way instead. It wasn't always necessarily *illegal* activities- some of his friends just used their skills to get better at their games. But still, he knew someone who could crack open a database or two.

She went by the online name of *plasticbitch2.0*. Izuku...didn't really quite understand the *origin* of that name, but it was very easy to remember, and she liked him (apparently she was older, in a gap year before college, and thought he was a 'cute little munchkin') and hunted down pretty much everything he asked for. She did say he asked for pretty weird things, but did it anyway.

Still, he felt bad calling her anything with 'bitch' in it, so she said he could use Hana as a nickname.

Can you get me any middle school files for these students?

Sure, kid. You stalking anyone?

No, just making sure they aren't bullies.

Fair enough.

Can you look into someone for me?

Always do ;)

Can you-

Just say what it is, munchkin kid

She was busy, though, so she taught him the tools of the trade herself. He would need it for when she wasn't around.

"...uld just give up, fucking reject," a voice said as Izuku approached the main gates, which made his ears perk up. Narrowing his eyes, he skulked closer, and hesitated near the wall, slowly peering around.

"Whatever," a purple-haired boy spat, like he'd had to repeat it several times, trying to shoulder his way past two taller boys. "Just buzz off. I'm busy."

"Busy trying and failing to become a hero?" one of the other two asked, mockingly. "You're never getting in. You might as well give up."

"Yeah, with a Quirk like that, you'd be a better villain."

Izuku felt a rush of pure, unadulterated *anger*.

He couldn't count the number of times boys had cornered him just like that and mocked him relentlessly for his dream. For even trying. What right did they have? Even if they were better in some ways, that didn't mean they had the right to trample on others' dreams!

He whipped around the corner and stormed towards them, combing through the extensive archive that was his brain by now.

"Hey, you two," he began, in a sweet voice, his current intense rage distracting him enough to make him forget his own hesitancy and tendency to stammer. He had never been good at standing up for himself, but when it came to other people, he had a protective streak a mile wide. "Oniwara Koji and Kudo Takeo, right?"

The two second-years paused and glanced at each other, undoubtedly confused as to how he knew their names, especially since he was obviously a tiny first-year. "Yeah, what of it-" the one called Koji, the one who'd said the boy should be a *villain*, began.

"I don't think you two have any space to go around telling people who should and shouldn't be a hero, or talking about villainous behavior. It wouldn't be very nice if I took this to the principal, would it? After all, that's what villains do- bully people. You wouldn't want to be *bullies*, would you? Not after that incident with Moriya-san in your second year of middle school at Taku Academy. That was such a shame, how you humiliated her in front of her whole class but only got off with a slap on the wrist. But Principal Nedzu would surely be interested in that, wouldn't he? He *is* supposed to foster the next generation of *heroes*, people who *prevent* such things..." By now, both were staring at him, incredibly pale, and who wouldn't? He had just come out of nowhere, he knew their names, and he knew a secret they thought no one would. He probably looked like a stalker. "And since we're outside school property, in public, I'm allowed to wear my body camera, for personal safety, you see, so it's currently recording everything, including what I just saw. That's the thing about bullying people out

in public where anyone could see! Maybe you're thinking, 'Well, if we beat him up and teach him a lesson and break the camera, he won't do anything, right?' Wrong." His smile got incredibly wider, making Takeo take a hesitant step back. "It uploads to my computer every thirty seconds, so not only would I have this footage, I would have footage of you two assaulting me, and the only way I wouldn't say anything would be if you *killed me.* Are either of you willing to *kill me*?"

He looked up into Koji's eyes with a dead, haunting look in his. The older boy swallowed heavily, stammering, and slowly shook his head. "N-n-no..."

"Then I suggest," Izuku replied lightly, "that you go home, forget this happened, and don't bully anyone again, because I keep very detailed notes on things like this. I know your names. I know your faces. I even know your Quirks, and I'll always have this footage. So run along, yeah?"

Takeo and Koji gave each other a frightened, hesitant glance. Izuku stomped his foot, impatient, and the two scattered, taking off down the street like the devil himself was on their heels.

Sticks and stones could break bones, but words could do much worse. Izuku knew that better than anyone.

Izuku watched them go, making sure they were out of sight, and then he remembered the boy he'd come to defend in the first place. He turned, and found said boy staring at him, eyes as wide as dinner plates, looking shellshocked. It broke him out of his anger as suddenly as if he'd been slapped with a fish.

"O-oh, I'm so sorry!" he stuttered, embarrassed at himself. "I didn't even ask your name! I'm so sorry that happened, it's terrible that bullies can get into even Yuuei, are you okay?- Did they hit you or anything? I can walk you to Recovery Girl-"

"I- I'm fine," the boy interrupted him, and Izuku flushed at his rambling. "I'm...fine. Man, how did you fucking...*do* that?"

"Do what?"

"You just- scared them off, and all you did was talk," the boy told him, looking perturbed. "How'd you even know all of that?"

"I know lots of things about everyone who goes here," Izuku replied,

vaguely, which made the other blink in confusion. "Speaking of- I recognize you! Aren't you the boy in General Studies with the Brainwashing Quirk?" he asked excitedly, starting to bounce up and down like an overeager puppy. "Oh, that's so cool! Do you think you'd be willing to answer some questions some time? Oh, I love voice-based Quirks, they're so interesting! Like, does it work if people hear a recording of you? Does it have to be face to face? And how extensive of an action can you command? Oh, I'm uh, I'm ranting again, sorry, uh-" He started to backpedal, realizing he was going to be late, and plastered on a bright grin. "You're trying to get into the Hero Course, right? I gotta get home, but-" He broke into a sprint, worried he would miss his train, and called over his shoulder. "Good luck! I know you can do it!"

The boy stood there staring after him, jaw hanging a bit in the wind, looking slightly more awake than usual. He had barely been able to keep up, let alone get in a word edgewise. "What's...your name..."

Training with Aizawa turned out to be more fun than Izuku had expected. It was *training,* he hadn't gone into it expecting *fun*, but it *was*, getting to spend more time with his teacher and learn new things! And it wasn't all that excruciating, since they only sparred on the shock absorbent pads that lessened the impact of any blows. Otherwise, Aizawa had him run on the obstacle courses in the gyms, though he was always nearby in case he had to catch him with his capture weapon. Izuku found that he really enjoyed rock climbing- it exercised a lot of useful areas of the body, for one, but it was also just fun- though he had no idea how to swim, so that was something Aizawa had to teach him from the ground up.

His Quirk, however, was still a bit of a conundrum to them.

Aizawa stared at his hand as they sat on one of the mats, looking pensive. "You still can't manage an energy flow without it exploding?" he asked, slightly rhetorically, making Izuku wince.

"No," he admitted, feeling embarrassed at his own lack of progress. He didn't know why it was so...difficult. Did it mean that he really was just...not suited for One For All?

"Hmm." Aizawa rubbed the back of his head as he sat there, staring so intently it was starting to make Izuku feel on edge. "What's the most you can do before it starts to hurt?"

"Uh...maybe heat my hand up? But it's just...so much energy, it's like

I'm trying to shove it all through a thimble..."

"Hmm." Aizawa hummed again, then frowned before standing up and nodding towards the door. "Follow me."

Izuku scrambled up and trotted after him. Even though it was after hours, Aizawa seemed fully confident someone would still be wherever they were going, as they headed back inside the school and past their classroom. They came to room that looked vaguely familiar- Izuku was sure he'd passed it a few times- and he slid the door open, pausing for a moment to check things out before walking in.

That was probably a good idea. It was the Support workshop, and Izuku had gathered that random explosions tended to happen at odd times.

"Hey, Aizawa," called out Power Loader, who sat at a workbench working on something with a screwdriver. "What brings you by?"

"I have a student who needs support items," Aizawa said, stopping at the other end of the bench. His expression was rather dry, but that might've been because it had been an hour since he'd used his eyedrops. The man was remarkably forgetful about his own regimen. "We just don't know what kind."

A loud bang startled Izuku into jumping. A whirl of motion came running at them from a corner of the workshop, and a few pieces of metal went flying as a girl came to a stop, adjusting her goggles with an insane grin. She had bright pink hair that he'd seen before (and also matched his hair clip). Hatsume Mei, if he wasn't mistaken.

"Did I hear SUPPORT ITEM MYSTERY?" she practically screamed, thrumming with excitement. "Power Loader, can I help? Please? Please? Please?"

"Okay, okay," Power Loader yelled over her, groaning. "Fine, fine. What's the sitch, Eraser?"

"The kid's Quirk works like an energy source. The problem is there's too much of it to be used effectively. He can't channel any of it without breaking his bones."

"Energy conductors!" Hatsume yelled, then wheeled over to Izuku, making him yelp. "I'm gonna need sample data, is that okay? Can you try and channel it for me? I'll have to get some readings, and also measure you-"

"Uh," Izuku said, while she pulled on one of his arms and took out a measuring tape from nowhere. "N-nice to meet you!"

"Nice to meet you too! The name's Hatsume Mei, and you are going to be *great* advertising for my babies!"

"Your. Babies?"

"My *babies!* My beloved little creations! I'll be able to whip a prototype up and get to work as soon as I can see you in action-"

"That will require Recovery Girl's presence," Aizawa interjected flatly. "As I said, his Quirk breaks his bones."

"Well, that's inconvenient," noted Power Loader from his place at the table. "And it limits the tests we can run. But I'm sure we can come up with something."

Izuku didn't break his arm, but he did kind of fry it, which was pretty painful, and made Recovery Girl shake her head with a sigh after he'd done his best to channel his Quirk and break the target Power Loader had set up. It made him feel pretty down, the fact that he couldn't even use it, and he slunk back over to where the others were standing hoping he didn't look as despondent as he felt.

Aizawa set a hand on his head and ruffled his hair. Then, he looked over to Hatsume. Izuku figured she must have been insanely smart if even the teachers were taking her opinion so seriously. "You get anything useful?"

"Useful? USEFUL? Oh, I got something USEFUL!" the girl cried, cackling. "That Quirk is amazing! The energy reading I got was off the charts! No wonder you can't use it, Izuku, the amount of power in your body could probably break your WHOLE body!" She said that rather cheerfully, but it made him wince, and Aizawa frown.

"Maybe this is one reason your Quirk came in so late," Power Loader said, looking up from a tablet in his hands. "It could have been unconscious self-preservation. I can't imagine a four year old surviving this kind of Quirk."

"Is it really so dangerous?" Aizawa questioned, frown still on his lips, having moved his hands to stuff them into his pockets. Izuku couldn't quite decipher his expression- was he mad? Disappointed? Wary?

"Well, it is right now," Hatsume continued, just as cheerily. "But when you get older, I'm sure your body will be able to conduct more of it safely. But for now, I can make you some babies that will help use a little, hmm, I'd say, about one percent?" Aizawa and Izuku stared at her, stunned. "I'm thinking arm braces and contact points down your legs to help conduct it through your entire body."

"My entire body?" Izuku parroted.

"Well, yeah! Part of the problem is even just a little is way too much for just one part of your body. But if you try and spread it out over your entire body, it should take some of the strain off. Comprende?" She wagged a finger back and forth in front of his face, grinning, and he hesitantly nodded.

"I...guess? Th-thank you for, um, all your help-"

"Oh, you don't have to thank me! You'll thank me by showing off my amazing babies on live television!"

"Er, what-"

Izuku's new costume was pumped out with alarming speed. If it was made by anyone else other than Power Loader and that insane girl, he would have questioned the quality, but he could tell it was going to work as soon as he activated One For All. The arm braces ran all the way up to his biceps, then connected to a thin, unobtrusive brace that sat on his collarbone, almost like a necklace, that ran a flexible line down to a belt that was connected to a special pair of boots. He called on his Quirk, and focused on trying to spread it through his whole body, like she'd suggested, and felt something else tugging it along, helping him do it without exploding parts of himself, almost guiding and taking some of the power along.

Rather than trying to punch something, he took a running start for one of the climbing walls, and then he was...on top of the wall, almost falling over.

The sound that came out of his mouth was embarrassing. He flailed his arms, falling on his ass, and let One For All fade away- and with it, the green lightning that had been crackling around his body. He turned and looked for Aizawa-sensei, completely confused, and found the man staring up at him from the start point with a stop watch in hand that he hadn't even gotten the chance to start. He was staring up at him with a slightly agape jaw, which mirrored how Izuku felt.

"...was that good?" he called down, trying not to sound too hopeful. He knew Mei was going to want an update later. It may or may not have been a mistake to give her his phone number.

"You did good today."

Izuku jumped and whipped his head around, a smile falling on his lips when he realized Aizawa was in fact speaking to him (there was no one else in the gym). "Really?" he asked, and it made Aizawa narrow his eyes at him. At least that didn't make Izuku feel uncomfortable anymore, because the man did it a lot.

He second-guesses any praise he gets. Did he get every shitty teacher out there? "Don't get discouraged by the fact you're only using one percent," Aizawa said, strolling over and taking a seat on the bench where his student was taking off the boots to his costume. "If that power source is really so gigantic, I'm impressed by the fact you haven't truly blown a limb off yet."

Izuku let out an uneven laugh. "Haha...yeah..."

Aizawa stared at him for a moment. He hadn't had high expectations for this year's class, but he had to admit he had been pleasantly surprised. Especially, however, by Midoriya. The boy had ten years' worth of training to catch up on, and he'd managed to not break any bones yet. After a few days, he'd managed to (for the most part) achieve what he called "Full Cowling" with a good success rate, though they were still working on his landing strategies.

It wasn't quite the physical success that Aizawa was impressed by, however. The student was someone who actually, truly embodied what the school waxed poetic about every semester. There were plenty of students who had the raw talent, or the raw power, or the physical ability, but lacked the drive. Midoriya was fully willing to just work, and he *had* to- he had to work harder than any of his peers just to catch up, and yet keep up at the same time, and he did so without complaining. He was serious about wanting to be a Hero; he wasn't there to play around or just have fun.

"You..." God, he wasn't good at this part. Hizashi was; Nemuri was. But Shouta just wasn't good at what Hizashi called "mushy feelings time." "You really are doing well, Midoriya. You drew an unlucky lot, but I'm. Proud of your progress."

There, that was satisfactory. He'd even managed to get the word proud

out. This teacher thing wasn't so hard.

Then Midoriya looked up at him. And he was crying.

No, not crying. His eyes were glimmering, but he wasn't letting himself cry.

Can't take praise.

Surprised when I compliment him.

Cries when I'm proud of him.

There was something severely wrong with something in Midoriya's past. It *couldn't* have just been Shouta's paranoia.

"Th...thanks, sensei!" Midoriya exclaimed, smiling to cover up the fact he was about to cry.

Ashamed of his emotions?

He set a hand on Midoriya's shoulder. He did it slowly, and obviously, and the boy didn't flinch, but he did stiffen and then relax. Typical Problem Child behavior.

Suddenly, Shouta realized he would probably kill a man to protect this batch of kids. He'd already given one a nickname. And gotten attached. God, this teacher thing was hard.

Izuku went home, and huddled over his desk that night, gnawing on his pencil for a while, and eventually scribbled in another star by Aizawa's name.

watch them sweat, and pant, and shake

Chapter Notes

> ok so first of all thanks so much to everyone who's commented and reads! i just wanted to say, (you'll probably see this on my other fics too), for some reason i've been getting a bunch of spam on my bnha fics? it really only happens on these, for some reason, but i just wanted to ask the people doing that to please stop since i'm starting to get more than actual reviews. sometimes it's random emojis, or just random words. (to be clear these don't get approved so if you've commented please know i'm not talking to you!! and if you didn't see your comment ao3 might've just ate it, it does that to me sometimes :/) (and for those offering just general encouragement thank you so much! but it would be more convenient to send that kind of thing to my tumblr :D) so from now please know i'll only approve comments relating to the fic, thank you! (and please do leave your thoughts, even if you're nervous about it like i get when commenting, i love reading them!)

"Hey."

Izuku looked up from where he was dumping his lunch tray into the trash, surprised when he saw the purple-haired boy from the other day standing there. He had a hand on the back of his neck, and wasn't looking him directly in the eyes, but it was obvious he was talking to him.

"Oh, hi," he replied. "Did you need something?"

"Just...uh," the other boy said, then rolled his eyes at himself. "Just- figured I should thank you for the other day. Look, I'm not here to make friends, but you helped me out, so...thanks."

Izuku stood there for a second, stunned someone was thanking him, before brightening. "It's no problem!" he exclaimed. "I'm Midoriya Izuku, by the way, but you can call me Izuku!"

"Shinsou Hitoshi, but like I said, I'm not-"

"You should come train with me next week!" Izuku bulldozed through whatever he'd been saying about not having friends, grinning. "Gym 5C, four o'clock, so you can practice hand to hand combat! You want

to be a hero, right? See you there!"

He turned and ran, leaving Shinsou with an open mouth, too excited to really notice the other boy trying to deny his offer.

He should've known the semester going smoothly was a bad omen.

Villains showing up at the USJ he could deal with. They could call for help. Then... There was just...a lot of them. And they couldn't call for help, and they were being scattered, and water was going down his throat.

Izuku coughed and spluttered. He still wasn't that great at swimming, and panic started to swirl in his mind as he activated his Quirk out of pure instinct to *not die*. A tidal wave formed in the water as he pushed off, scrambling for the bank, and pulled himself up the side, hacking and dribbling water.

It was a horrifying scene he looked up to. There were villains *everywhere*, and Aizawa-sensei was fighting them all alone. More panic sat in his gut, and he had to clamp down on the urge to take off running, to try and help, because he would probably just make it harder for his teacher.

Then his eyes landed on two villains who *weren't* attacking Eraserhead.

A gigantic, terrifying-looking creature, and a slim man in frayed clothes with...hands, god, were those real hands?...all over his body, one obscuring his face.

What...the hell...?

That...that had to be the person calling the shots-

The villains' leader.

Apex predator.

His Quirk thrummed restlessly beneath his skin. He was making a very stupid decision, he should have run and helped someone else, but something made his feet start moving forward. He had to keep them all safe. He had to make sure the ringleader didn't get them. He had to make sure...

"Oh? What's this? Some hero hopeful brat?"

Izuku barely registered the fact that the villain had spoken to him. He came to a stop, a few paces away, and distantly wondered what the hell he was doing. Instead, what came out of his mouth was- "What're you doing?"

The villain paused, like he hadn't been expecting that question. "What?"

"What're you doing?" Izuku repeated, a frown settling on his lips. "You're just standing here...aren't you attacking us?"

The man snorted derisively. He sounded young, not like a teenager, but not like he was all that old, either. "Oh, please. I wouldn't waste my time on NPCs like you. You're just bait. All Might was supposed to be here, wasn't he?" Even past the hand, Izuku could see a bone-chilling grin. "I can't wait until he gets here and I get to end the Symbol of Peace once and for all!"

Stay calm, Izuku urged himself, years of having to stand still and listen to Bakugou's explosions going off by his ears just inches from his skin repressing even the smallest twitch. *He didn't plan this through. All Might's not here. He's not re-evaluating. He isn't thinking that more heroes will probably show up.*

Not a chess player, then. A lesser apex predator.

"Why do you wanna kill All Might?"

The thought made him feel even more panicked, because if the guy was so sure he could do it, he had to have something powerful up his sleeve- namely, the giant creature behind him- but he forced himself to remain calm.

"To blow the top off this wretched society wide open!" the man yelled, then swept his hands out with a broken cackle. "To show everyone that their *Symbol of Peace* is just a prop, another government-sanctioned tool of violence that only makes them feel safe with lies. Heroes don't save people." A sneer appeared on his lips, derogatory and vindictive. "All you Pros...all you do is punch people and call it a day."

Despite the rapid beating of his heart, Izuku's brain was quickly categorizing everything the man said. He hated it, but he understood what he was saying- and what he wasn't. He was more than familiar with being disillusioned by society. But an ideological debate right now wasn't going to convince the guy to leave them alone; Izuku

doubted he even could convince him.

"You're right."

The villain froze. He tilted his head, slowly, like a sort of dog, and turned his whole body to look at him, which felt worse. A LOT worse. "What?"

"I said-" Izuku began, clearing his throat.

"Oh, no," the man interrupted him, sounding angrier than before. *Danger.* "Don't you try and pull that shit on me. 'Oh, I understand how you feel, but let us trample all over you anyway-'"

"That's not what I mean," Izuku blazed on, hoping this gamble worked. "I mean, I still think this is a stupid, thoughtless, reckless plan, and you aren't going to be able to kill All Might, and I'd rather you leave me and my classmates alone, but you are right."

The man froze again. He was twitching, as was the monster behind him, which seemed to grow more agitated when he did, and he looked like he was splitting down the middle. Like he couldn't possibly conceive of how Izuku was both agreeing and disagreeing with him at the same time.

"...Explain," he said, voice quiet and cold.

"Not all heroes are good people," Izuku said quickly, a chill to him that wasn't just from the water. "There's a *lot* of bad ones. People aren't actually safe just because All Might exists. Even if he's powerful, he's one person, and he can't be everywhere all the time. So you're right about that, but this isn't going to help you any." For a moment, he paused, and all he could hear was the sounds of his classmates fighting in the distance. "Think about it. If word got out that you killed a bunch of first-years, people you could also say are the youngest ones being indoctrinated into hero society, and the people who are most likely to switch causes, wouldn't the media just vilify you? They'd just see a guy who killed a bunch of kids. No one would be on your side, or listen to what you had to say. Furthermore...this plan is clearly just thrown together." He raised a hand to encompass everything around them, imagining Bakugou's voice saying he was so stupid for doing this. "I mean, your own allies are obviously just 'NPCs'. They're getting taken out by first years with little to no training and a man who by all rights is fighting Quirkless because he has no offensive Quirk. That tells me you don't care about them, that they're just a distraction. So the only real threats are you, that warping

villain, who hasn't done anything but displace people, and...whatever his name is." His eyes flicked to the giant monster, anxious, and he swallowed. *Don't show your fear.* "You attacked a training ground of Yuuei, and we aren't that far out from the school. If All Might hears about this, the other teachers are going to as well, and they're all going to come here. Even if you're as powerful as *All Might,* you'll then be outmatched, because All Might and countless other Pros will be here. Even if you kill All Might, what then? All that will be on the news is you killed Japan's most beloved hero, nothing about whatever message you're trying to spread. People will *hate* you."

He stopped, and for several moments, the distant sounds of battle became a rush in his ears and they could have heard a pin drop. The man stared at him, neck twitching, and slowly let out a harsh-sounding breath. He reached up and scratched at his neck, breathing heavier, and gnashed his teeth. "You...you're..."

Uh oh.

Apex predators only reacted in two ways when confronted: they either backed down, or exploded.

Izuku had always had rotten luck.

"Let's see what your smart little mouth thinks of this!" the man raged, rushing towards him with a palm outstretched.

That was the moment Izuku saw Aizawa, yards away from them in between two men trying to wrestle with them both, staring at them with a gaze burning with panic, not just *my student is being attacked* kind of panic but raw, *he's going to die* panic, and he vaguely noted he really wished he knew what this villain's Quirk was.

The guy swiped at him, but nothing happened. Partly because Izuku ducked, partly because Aizawa's eyes were now burning a hole into him, bright red.

The man growled and tried to grab him again. Izuku activated Full Cowling and retreated a few yards, not yet attacking, and let out a slow breath.

NPCs.

"You're trying to be the protagonist, aren't you?" he probed, dropping into more of a crouch and narrowing his eyes. "Like All Might is the big boss fight you need to level up?" The man froze, as it somehow

resonated with him, and looked at Izuku with feral eyes. "But you're going at a mission under-leveled with no party members. No smart player does that. Certainly not someone trying to be the boss."

It was either the wrong, or exactly right thing to say, because the villain made a mad dash at him, and then Aizawa came crashing in- literally.

He crashed into the man who Izuku would later learn was called Shigaraki, rolling in the dirt, and came to a stop pressing down on his side with one of the man's arms bent to the side, eyes glowing a fiery red. "Stay the hell away from my student," he growled, goggles cracked but not yet broken.

"Nomu!" Shigaraki yelled, and the giant creature lunged.

Izuku screamed. "No!"

That's when the wall busted open.

In the end, when nearly all the criminals were laid out on the floor, All Might was clashing with the Nomu, and someone had yelled out that help was on the way because Iida had managed to escape, Izuku saw the villain- from behind Aizawa-sensei, seeing as the man was standing there in front of him with his knife in case Shigaraki tried to make a move for him- tilt his head and let out a quiet, dull order. "Kurogiri, let's go."

A purple warp appeared behind him. "Young Master, are you sure-"

"Let's go. I need...to level up."

He sent an intense stare Izuku's way, which made Aizawa edge in front of him further, and then the duo was gone.

Izuku let out a sigh of relief.

When the other teachers arrived, and sat everyone down on the steps for first-aid, he caught wind of Tsu complaining that Mineta had groped her when she *rescued* him, and that familiar little anger reared its head again. It seemed he had someone new to dig up dirt on.

The news that Izuku had basically convinced the villains to leave merely by talking to their leader swept through school like wildfire. Izuku didn't think that was accurate- if his classmates hadn't done so

well defeating the lesser villains, if All Might hadn't arrived, if the other Pros hadn't either, they'd have all been toast, he thought- but people looked at him with awe. The other first-years seemed impressed with him, and honestly, he hated the attention.

Aizawa patted him on the head after the fact and told him to "Never, ever, and I mean *never*, do something that reckless again, Problem Child."

"So," Hitoshi said, a bit awkwardly, when he showed up to the gym like he hadn't agreed to, "guess you're kind of a big deal, huh?"

"Please don't say that," Izuku replied desperately, biting back a groan. "I didn't even do anything, honestly. Everyone else was way more useful."

"They say you've got some bigshot Quirk though."

"I really don't," Izuku countered, oozing something like...guilt? "I swear, I'm more worthless than everyone in my class. I'm not useful at all."

Something about the way he talked about himself made Hitoshi...uncomfortable. "If you've got such a great Quirk, why didn't you use that?" he asked, feeling suspicious. Izuku's eyes darted away from him as he scuffed one heel in the dirt. Something about the way he talked, about how he carried himself, called out to something in Hitoshi. Like he was talking to...himself. Like maybe Midoriya understood him somehow.

"Well...it didn't actually come in until recently, and I'm not that trained with it, so it can be dangerous to use...I actually thought I was Quirkless most of my life, although I always wanted to come here, but everyone said that was stupid..." Midoriya said, trailing off into a mumbled rant as was apparently his habit. "A Quirkless loser can't really amount to much, but uh, turns out I have one after all, so I'm just trying to not break anything else and...sorry, I'm rambling, I know it's really annoying-"

Hitoshi didn't think it was annoying. He thought it was illuminating. People would be pretty stupid if they didn't listen to the other boy, he thought. There was so much information to be had when people didn't even realize they were talking.

Quirkless loser.

Everyone said that was stupid.

The way he hunched in on himself when particularly loud noises went off in the cafeteria. Hitoshi had noticed.

He had a growing hunch that Izuku was a lot like him after all.

So, he could stand being friends with someone with such a ridiculously powerful Quirk if that was the situation.

"Brought a sparring partner today, Midoriya?"

And there was the teacher for 1A. Hitoshi clamped down on a flinch of his own, hopefully before the man noticed. Izuku brightened like the sun appearing from behind some clouds. "This is Shinsou! He wants to be a hero, he's in General Studies, so I told him he could spar with me!"

Hitoshi didn't know why, but he felt like he'd hitched a ride with something wildly unpredictable. Weird.

Two days later, he peered over Izuku's shoulder at lunch with a raised eyebrow as he tapped away at a tablet in his hands. "What're you doing?" he asked, trying to appraise it for himself but unable to read anything at the speed Izuku was scrolling.

The other boy glanced up at him and smiled. It was very pure, innocent, and all teeth. "Oh, I'm going to get Mineta expelled!"

Hitoshi stood there blankly and said nothing. Some nobody from 1B he didn't know the name of behind them cringed and picked up the pace to get away from them.

"Send me anything that turns out funny," he ended up settling on, and promptly walked away. He didn't want to get all wrapped up in that mess.

Stalking the Halls

Mineta was acting nervous.

Probably due to the fact that Izuku had been following him for four days straight.

Even the most unobservant of targets would pick up on the fact they were being watched eventually. Mineta didn't know it was him, he only started to become jumpy and looked around like he was being stalked when he felt Izuku's eyes on him. A small part of Izuku's brain reveled in it, because the boy deserved it. It was how he made girls feel, so why shouldn't he get a taste of it?

The "accident" at USJ hadn't been Mineta's only offense, as Izuku's research had turned up. Mina said he made uncomfortable comments to her almost daily. Tsu said he'd definitely grabbed her on purpose and clearly enjoyed it. Kyouka and Momo both grimaced and corroborated the fact he made crude comments either to them or around them, and even Toru, being invisible, didn't escape it, as she'd sounded teary-eyed when she said Mineta had made a comment about how disappointing it was her chest couldn't be seen but it was "exciting" to know he was looking at her when she had to disrobe to use her invisibility. Then Ochako told him she'd caught Mineta trying to peek into their *locker rooms*.

Oh, Izuku was pissed.

Mere weeks into school, and Mineta was already doing such disgusting things? How worse would he get as the year went on, and he didn't get punished for his behavior because he always made up an excuse or only did it where a teacher wouldn't see?

"Hi, Mineta."

The smaller boy squeaked and whipped around when Izuku spoke. They were standing in the hallway, near the restrooms, and Mineta had been staring at the girls' room, looking like he was inching closer.

"Oh, Midoriya!" he said, laughing uneasily. "Whatcha doing, pal?"

"Just watching you," Izuku returned in a cool tone of voice, making Mineta pale. There was, after all, no reason to lie about what he was doing. "You weren't planning on trying to sneak into the girls'

restroom, were you?"

"What? No," Mineta laughed, the lie clear in his voice.

"Well, that's good. That would be a bad thing to do, you know? Something a *villain* would do. You wouldn't do anything like that, would you, Mineta?"

"No. I-I-I swear I wouldn't," Mineta told him, a tremor in his voice and a shaky smile on his face. *Lie.*

There really was no hope for him.

Unaware that there were people around them who had stopped to watch, Izuku let a smile onto his face. It made Mineta squeak again. "Well, that's good. Say, why don't we walk back to class together? Lunch is almost over, after all."

"Oh, you don't need to d-do that-"

"It's fine, we're together, after all. If you need to do something I can wait."

"No," Mineta muttered, ducking his head. "I don't...need to do anything. We can g-go."

Izuku smiled and walked beside him in the hall, right next to him, so close the other boy was clearly afraid without fully knowing why. He never noticed how people moved out of their way.

Izuku turned up the ante over the next few days.

Every day, he kept one eye on Mineta, glancing at him every so often in class so he knew someone was watching, and sat next to him at lunch, maneuvering them so no girls were near him. When they changed for training, Izuku lingered, standing at the entrance to the girls' locker rooms and staring Mineta down while they all trickled out fully dressed. In training, he volunteered to partner up with Mineta or, if he was on an opposing team, always went for him first.

Everyone else had noticed him hanging around Mineta more by now. Most of the class chalked it up to him being friendly, but the girls all gave him thankful looks and smiles when they passed him. They were by no means just passive participants, however. They wrote down every comment Mineta still managed to make and walked in groups,

glaring at Mineta when they saw him, obviously singling him out and making him aware they knew what he was doing.

Izuku had also formed an odd friendship with Momo over this. She was usually the messenger between him and the other girls, and seemed so grateful for his help; she pulled a copy of his favorite type of candy bar out of her wrist while they stood around watching sparring matches not ten minutes after she'd glared at Mineta and said she wasn't a production factory when he'd asked if he could make things for them. That had been a little funny.

It wasn't like they were harassing Mineta, though. They left him alone after hours and didn't give him any attention that wasn't meant to ward him away. Izuku knew his type exactly: any tiny thing they could make out to be an offense against them, they would. They would say they were being bullied or unfairly judged or whatever else to make people feel bad for them so they could keep being creepy.

Mineta, however, didn't exercise the same caution, and Izuku walked up behind him outside the school gates after school one day while he was talking to Kyouka, who had a look of disgust on her face, and caught the tail end of what he was saying. "Come on, Jirou, just for a second!"

Kyouka's eyes landed on Midoriya a mere two feet behind him. Her expression changed, just slightly, and she put more venom into her next sentence. "I'm not letting you touch my breasts, Mineta," she spat.

"Come on," Mineta whined, waving his hands. "It's not like you have much, you should be flattered a guy is interested!" Kyouka twitched wildly, and Momo scowled beside Izuku, but neither of them did anything. Better to let Mineta seal his own fate, they thought.

"This is a gross way to talk to someone, and even if I liked guys, I still wouldn't let you do it."

Mineta's face lit up; Izuku could tell just from his tone. "Wait, you like girls? Hehe, that's even better, maybe you and Asui can touch each *other* and I can just have a peek...?"

"I told you, leave me alone, and no!"

"Hi, Mineta," Izuku finally interrupted, smiling as Mineta shrieked and whipped around with a look of pure horror.

"M-Midoriya? What are you doing?"

"Walking home, what else would I be doing?" Izuku returned rhetorically, tilting his head. "Hey Kyouka, why don't you walk with Momo and I? It's better to walk with people, and I wear a body camera for safety."

Kyouka smiled triumphantly at him. "Sure thing, 'Zuku."

Izuku took great satisfaction in the pale, terrified look on Mineta's face as they walked away.

The staff room was, blessedly, empty when Izuku made a trip to it with a usb drive to see Aizawa. It was the man's office hours, which meant he was at his desk working (though most of the time he was passed out in his sleeping bag), and Mic-sensei had let him out of class when he said he needed to go see Aizawa. He was fairly flexible when it came to things like that.

Even though he knew what he was doing was right, Izuku felt a bit nervous when he stepped inside and saw Aizawa sitting at his desk. His expression was dull, and he looked like he'd rather be doing anything else than what he was (which was, ironically, searching for information on Izuku's own middle school). Izuku wondered how much sleep he'd gotten the night before.

"Uh, Aizawa-sensei?"

Aizawa blinked and reflexively clicked out of his window. He turned in his chair, rubbing at his eyes, and squinted at him. "Midoriya? Why are you out of class?"

"Mic-sensei said I could come see you," Izuku replied, holding out his drive a bit jerkily. "I needed to give this to you."

Aizawa raised an eyebrow and took it from him. Izuku pulled a small bunch of papers from his backpack and handed those to him as well, and he frowned down at them. "What are these?"

"Well." Izuku paused, hesitating. "They're from the girls. I didn't know if you would need signed copies, so..."

"Signed copies? About?"

"...Mineta." Aizawa's frown deepened, and Izuku struggled not to cringe. "He's really creepy, and he's always making comments to the girls that I think are sexual harassment. We keep catching him trying

to sneak into the locker rooms, or bathrooms, but he always makes up an excuse like he got lost or was just walking by, so I thought we would need more evidence to get him expelled, or at least moved to a different class...I recorded him with my camera outside of school harassing Kyouka and trying to get her to let him touch her, and for everything else I made a log of where he was and what time it was when he said or did something, because I figure the hallways at least have security cameras, so you can corroborate what the girls said, and I also looked up where he went to middle school, and found some of the girls from his graduating class online, and they all have stories about him, but I don't know if his school will have any record of it."

Aizawa's face got progressively grumpier as he spoke, though it was more likely due to the contents of the letter he was reading from Toru. "I've expelled students for less, so I don't need any files from his old school, but I'll look into it anyway," he said, still scowling as he looked up, though his voice changed back into a neutral tone before addressing him directly. "Why didn't you come to me about this right away?"

Izuku paused. Why hadn't he? He didn't know if he'd thought Aizawa would believe them or not; it was really just...habit. "Erm...it...didn't occur to me, sensei. Sorry," he said, averting his eyes and flushing a deep red.

Aizawa sat there for a moment, thinking of the relatively spotless reputation Midoriya's middle school had, but also the fact it serviced an area with less than a 0.3% Quirkless population.

"It's fine," he said. "But please know in the future you can come to me about anything. If there is anything, any person, any student-" After a pause, he tacked on, "-Any teacher, that bothers you or someone you know, please tell me right away. I promise I will believe you."

He reached out and ruffled the boy's hair. "Really?" tumbled out of Izuku's mouth, on reflex, as he stared wide-eyed at him, cementing Aizawa's suspicion that a long string of adults in his student's life had failed him even if he didn't know exactly how or in what ways.

"Yes, Problem Child, really."

Midoriya smiled. Even though Aizawa had felt like strangling something mere moments before, that part, that part felt good.

Midoriya added two stars to his notebook entry when he got home.

With a string of girls behind him, including two from class 1B he didn't know but were now watching from the corner of the hall like hawks after being absorbed into their group without question, Izuku peered at the door to Mic-sensei's class where Aizawa had gone inside after Present Mic held Mineta back. The usually-cheerful blond had looked carefully blank when he'd pulled the door shut.

After about two minutes, the door flew open harder than usual. It didn't quite slam, but it was clear whoever had opened it was in a sour mood. Mineta walked out, pale in the face and with giant alligator tears in his eyes, with Aizawa behind him, glowering with his hands shoved into his pockets. They marched away without saying anything, but Izuku saw Mineta's student ID hanging off Aizawa's belt, and realized with a grin that he was escorting him off campus.

Present Mic exited the classroom and sighed. "What a disappointment," he muttered, in English, which Izuku understood better now that he had All Might to practice with, before heading off to wherever his next class was.

"Nice job, Midoriya!" Mina exclaimed, pushing off the wall with a beam and raising a hand to high-five him. She started a string of them all around as they stood in the hall sacrificing part of their lunch to celebrate the grape creep's expulsion, cheering to themselves.

When they did head to the cafeteria, all smiles, and a boy ahead in line realized Midoriya was behind him, he turned with a nervous smile and gave off a laugh. "Here, uh, you can move up ahead of me!"

"Really? Thanks," Izuku replied, totally oblivious as several boys let them move up, and he figured it was because he was with a pack of girls. They stopped when they got to another girl with orange hair near the front, after all, who just gave him a bright smile and a wink. A blond boy ahead of her muttered something about 'white-knighting pretentious little-' and she promptly punched him in the gut, an incident that didn't appear to worry anyone around them.

People were being friendly, and Mineta was gone! He considered that a great day, in his books.

"As not just a female Pro but a female teacher here at UA, I feel the need to address what happened last Friday," Midnight said on Monday morning, hands on her hips as she stood at the podium holding her textbook open. "A student was expelled for sexual harassment, and I want to make sure you all know that isn't tolerated at UA, *especially* by

me. Sexual harassment can happen to anyone, of any gender, and similarly be perpetrated by anyone of any gender, and if you feel you've experienced it, you should always come to a teacher about it. However, it is also a problem that disproportionately affects women heroes and those of a different sexual orientation or gender identity than the norm. That makes it all the more important to watch out for your friends and be an ally to those who need it. That is a true motivation of being a hero. If any of you ever need someone to speak with, I promise I will listen, *and* believe you, and if you don't want to talk to me, we have several school counselors available for you."

She glanced over at where Izuku was sitting and let out a smile. "And to those of you who *did* watch out for your friends, thank you. You are *already* showing the most important part of being a hero."

Izuku flushed in embarrassment, but no one was looking at him, other than Ochako sending him a small smile, because Midnight hadn't made it apparent she was staring at him. It felt...nice, knowing she approved of him but wasn't going to drag it out in front of the whole class.

That class period was focused on improving their hero costumes. Midnight made her way around the room, making suggestions and pointing out possible flaws, and when she saw the detailed sketch he'd been working on with Mei, crouched down and spent several minutes talking with him about it and ways he could make it stand out from the crowd a little more without being an eyesore or giving up his green schtick.

She didn't think any of his ideas were stupid- that, in itself, was nice too. Izuku blocked in a star by her name and put down some notes, content that night.

Shake My Mane

Chapter Notes

> izuku: wow i'm only becoming comfortable and confident in myself with friends and reliable mentors for the first time in my life, what could have possibly induced these changes in my power???

"Good job, my boy," was rapidly becoming one of Izuku's favorite things to hear, because All Might always said it at the end of their training sessions at the beach. He always said it with a cheerful smile, a shine in his eye, a look of pride that felt so unfamiliar to receive. He'd been rather apologetic that Izuku's arm had broken at the entrance exam (not that he could have avoided it, because Izuku's body would have exploded even worse even a day earlier) but overjoyed that he'd found a way to channel the power of One For All safely. More often than not their "training" just devolved into fancy games of tag with Full Cowling that were definitely for educational purposes only (even if there was a lot of laughing involved).

He'd also suggested, in Izuku's spare time, to try and meditate to get a better feel of One For All.

So, that's what he was doing.

"Is this supposed to do something?"

"Meditation can be a useful training technique," Aizawa intoned, answering Hitoshi, who just sighed in response. The man sounded half asleep, and he was very much using this as an excuse to try and nap.

Somewhere off to the side, Mei hummed happily to herself as she fiddled with the piece of support equipment she was making for Hitoshi. He'd said multiple times she didn't have to make anything for him, but she'd just responded with "You will accept and show off the deliciousness I put in motion for you, and take my baby!" which had rendered him silent for about a full hour.

Hitoshi may have thought it was silly, but Izuku actually found himself enjoying it. Meditation, that is. He felt weightless, like all his worries were far away...like no one could say anything that bothered him ever again. Maybe All Might's advice had something to it- maybe he was getting something useful out of this!

"You're just napping and you know it," Hitoshi said, and for some reason, he sounded far away.

What?

Izuku opened his eyes to look at his friend. Except Hitoshi wasn't there. All he could see was the side of the gym, many yards away, and he was eye-level with the line of windows above their heads.

The fact that he was floating in midair hit him a moment later, and his brain fast-tracked past his logic and decided to scream.

"*Oh my god!"* he shrieked, flailing his arms. What was he supposed to do?! Stay still or try to move? Which one would make him fall? "*Oh my god oh my god sensei sensei Aizawa-sensei-"*

Aizawa's capture weapon whirled out and folded around him in a flash of movement. Izuku felt himself being tugged down, eerily similar to how Aizawa had been forced to pull Uraraka down one time during training when she got sick midair and couldn't come down on her own. He wasn't screaming anymore, the weight of the capture weapon around him almost like a comforting blanket, but he was breathing heavily when Aizawa wrapped both arms around his upper body and held him to his chest on the ground, eyes going red.

"Midoriya," he said, as calmly and rationally as he could, even though he'd clearly just had the shit scared out of him, because his voice never went as tense as this. "Calm down. You're all right."

Hitoshi stared at him with wide eyes. It wasn't every day one's friends just went floating off into the distance, after all. Izuku focused on his breathing, then felt a rush of embarrassment, realizing how silly he must have sounded and probably looked. "I'm...I'm fine," he said, though he was still trembling a little. "I'm...ok."

Aizawa let his own Quirk deactivate. Like magic, Izuku started to float again, and he barely contained a shriek as Aizawa tightened his grip again.

The teacher turned until he found Hitoshi still sitting there like a startled deer. "Go get Ochako Uraraka," he barked out, eyes squinting in a way Hitoshi understood to mean they were starting to feel dry. "She's in 1A's classroom, brunette hair. Go!"

Hitoshi jumped and leapt to his feet, streaking out of the gym to go and find Uraraka and interrupt whatever she was doing during their

free period. Izuku tried to calm himself down, he really did, but Mei's excited yammering in the background about the possibilities this unveiled about his Quirk didn't help much. After all, it was his Quirk that was doing it, as evidenced by Aizawa's canceling it out, and that meant he now had to learn to control *floating*, too. Great.

"See? This isn't so bad," Ochako told him, face soft and excited all at once as she held his hands a few feet above the sparring pads. Hers were alight with a pink glow, anchoring them both in place. "I think it's great you can float, Izuku, that means we can plan team attacks!"

Izuku glanced down at the ground and let out a watery smile. He really had underestimated the constitution it took to use her Quirk, not that he'd thought Ochako was a chump or anything. Just the knowledge that at any moment, he could go crashing to the ground, and probably break everything in his body was wigging him out.

"Yeah..." he said with a half-hearted laugh. "Guess my Quirk is just...full of surprises!"

"Don't float away into the sun," Hitoshi called up quite helpfully from the sidelines, a hand cupped around his mouth. Beside him, Aizawa looked very much like he was trying hard not to roll his eyes, boxing the boy on top of the head as lightly as he would a kitten.

"Come on," Ochako urged him, taking away one of her hands and making him jump. He looked up at her with frantic green eyes, but she just gave him an encouraging smile. "It's fine! I promise. Floating is really fun once you get used to it! I know it's really scary at first, but I won't let you fall. I promise. Remember the entrance exam?"

Izuku thought back to the first day he'd met her. He'd saved her life, then she'd saved his, by slapping him; literally. "Yeah."

"You fell from *way* higher then! But I still didn't let you fall, and I won't now. Deal?"

Izuku hesitantly glanced down at their joined hands. He looked back up at her and tried to muster a smile of his own, and slowly eased his grip on her. "Okay."

She let go of him, and he floated, all on his own.

There were a few points at which Aizawa had to retrieve him from the

ceiling of their classroom over the next two days. Bakugou had metaphorically and literally exploded when it came out that Izuku had *another* power, which Aizawa believed to be subtle energy radiating from his body and allowing him to levitate (he had no idea if that was true or not, as he hadn't had a chance to ask All Might yet), and it had startled Izuku so badly he'd almost darted behind their homeroom teacher to hide. The glare Aizawa gave Bakugou cowed him, at least, and everyone *else* decided to congratulate him, and Ochako was still overjoyed their powers were so similar.

Then at their next training session *another* Quirk came out.

Izuku hadn't meant to, not really- he'd known he would eventually fall down, at least once, like the metaphorical first fall from a horse all riders had to go through. Still, he panicked when the floating ability suddenly stopped, and threw out his arm to try and hang onto something. Nothing was close enough, though.

That was when a black tendril shot out and wrapped around one of the rafters of the ceiling.

Now, he hadn't entirely meant to, but gut instinct along with the new and weird connection he felt with One For All had just...made it happen, somehow. Izuku hung for a minute, just staring, before slowly turning to look at Aizawa and Mei on the ground. Predictably, Mei looked overjoyed, clicking at her portable computer with the speed of a jaguar as she speculated on how his new power worked, and Aizawa looked disbelieving, staring at him like he would sprout another head too.

"You're OP," Hitoshi said from one of the rock climbing walls, a little petty but not truly upset. "Unfair."

They decided to keep that one under wraps. Izuku didn't want Bakugou to explode *again*.

But still, he really needed to talk to All Might now.

The black tendrils seemed much more wiry and hard to handle than floating, and he didn't manage to summon another one again for a day, and he decided to be content with a slow pace for once as he went and hunted All Might down during lunch. He tended to eat alone in one of the staff rooms, and Izuku had a weird sense for finding the man.

"All Might?"

He hesitantly peered into the room Toshinori usually inhabited. He looked up, cheerful, from the sofa, and motioned for him to step inside. "Come on in, my boy! How are you?"

"Fine," Izuku said, but All Might must have noticed his down mood, because a slight frown came across his haggard face.

"Something the matter, young Midoriya?"

"Um...not exactly," Izuku replied, walking over to the couch across from him and sitting down. What question did he start with? "So, uh...I had some questions about One For All?"

Toshinori raised an eyebrow at him. "Of course, Midoriya, anything you'd like to know."

What if he doesn't know? "Uh. So...the only power it ever gave you, was uh, super strength?"

A small crease formed between Toshinori's eyebrows. "Yes, it increased my vitality and gave me access to an enormous stock of power that allowed me to pull off such feats as jumping between buildings and smashing monsters. Why do you ask?"

"Well, uh...just to be sure...it never let you do *anything* else?" Izuku was starting to sweat, starting to get nervous, which now made him start to float away sometimes, which made him even more nervous. "Like, uh, levitate?"

Toshinori's eyebrows shot up. "Excuse me?" he asked, but he sounded surprised, not offended. "You said...levitate?"

"I was in the gym the other day and then I started floating," Izuku blurted out. "And I fell while I was floating and caught myself with a piece of black energy? You said One For All is a stockpiling Quirk, right? Does that mean it collected other powers? Did I steal people's Quirks? Does-"

"Midoriya, Midoriya, wait!" Toshinori cried, holding his hands up, and dropping his chopsticks in the process. He looked positively befuddled, eyes wider than usual. "You're saying- you actually flew? Can you show me?"

Nodding, Izuku bit his lip in concentration and slowly came floating

off the sofa. Toshinori paled a little, looking as though he'd seen a ghost, but then his expression took a completely one-eighty, and he lit up.

"My boy," he said, sounding excited as he reached up to grab Izuku's sleeves and drag him back down. "I had no idea this was possible, but- it's exactly... Exactly as I remember. You're...using the Quirk of my late master, Nana Shimura. She utilized the power of Float to fly through the sky, just as you just did."

"So...it *is* her Quirk?" Izuku asked, brain still lagging.

"Yes!" Toshinori cried excitedly. "It's as you said, One For All is a stockpiling Quirk- it must take the Quirk of its current user into its core and pass it onto the next user. That would mean you theoretically have access to every Quirk of those who came before you."

"But- but why didn't you ever feel them?"

"I'm not sure of the answer to that," Toshinori admitted, making sure he was solidly on the couch before letting go of him. "Perhaps because I didn't truly need them. I trained intensely to receive One For All, and I didn't share the same level of danger upon using it as your body does. Even if it is hard to master, I have always believed that One For All is intuitively protective of its user, and perhaps this is its way of giving you aid."

Izuku glanced down at his hands and thought over his mentor's words. If he was correct, did that mean that his Quirk...approved of him? Found him worthy to succeed All Might? Thought he of all people was worthy of wielding *One For All*?

"Oh yeah," he said, as an afterthought, trying not to let how emotional he was feeling bleed into his voice. "I, uh, kind of had to tell Aizawa-sensei...kind of what's going on. He...got really suspicious after I got a *third* Quirk..."

"Ah," Toshinori said, sure he would receive an earful later from the other man. "Well, it can't be helped... He is very intelligent, he would have sensed something was amiss eventually... Erm, my boy? Young Midoriya? Midoriya, you- Izuku, you're floating to the ceiling."

"I *am* very unimpressed, if you're wondering, Problem Child, but that is something I'll take up with All Might, not you," Aizawa-sensei had said, looking vaguely annoyed as they stood in the gym. And he did

give All Might a mild tongue lashing, Izuku was guessing, because he spotted Toshinori coming out of the staff room looking mildly chastised and a bit embarrassed and Aizawa following him rolling his eyes. Aizawa flat out told him he'd criticized the Symbol of Peace to his face when he asked, but couldn't fault the whole situation too much, because even he couldn't guess the threshold for "When is someone prepared to receive a powerful stockpile Quirk?" if "pull cars and a heavy fridge with All Might himself on it off the beach" wasn't enough.

Black Whip exploded on him when he tried to use it again, a writhing mass of black tentacles waving everywhere, and busted through Mei's latest round of equipment that thankfully saved him from some broken bones. He was determined to use it, though, and eventually managed to get one single whip to spring forth from his arm, and then two, and then he split it off into three. He just wouldn't take no for an answer, even if it meant breaking more parts of his body. Something about the Quirk seemed to...respect that, almost.

And perhaps his primary motivation was that if an offensive strength Quirk wouldn't work, and an evasive flying Quirk wouldn't work, a defensive restraint Quirk would help him out in a lot of situations, because his teacher fought just the same way. Indeed, the whips were well suited to functioning just like Aizawa-sensei's capture weapon, and maybe he did want to match with Hitoshi on team attacks now that the other boy was using a capture weapon of his own too. (And maybe they ended up haphazardly swinging around the gym like they were on a bunch of monkey bars while Aizawa's back was turned, and ended up rolled up in his weapon when he returned and scolded them, but that was another matter entirely.)

The next week, they received news about the upcoming Sports Festival, and he wondered idly if he still had his tapes from the last year.

at the watering hole

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Uh, hey, Jirou," Izuku heard Kaminari laugh unevenly at lunch, shortly after Mineta was expelled. "And Yaororozu...and Uraraka...And Midoriya!"

Izuku looked up from where he was shoved in between Ochako and Momo at their table, while Kyouka raised an eyebrow at the anxious blond from her side of the table. Tsuyu had been sitting beside her, but she'd gone to get more chocolate milk. "What's up, Kaminari?"

Izuku could practically see the sweat shine on Kaminari's forehead. He sent another anxious glance towards him- maybe for reassurance?- and cleared his throat. "Well, uh, I just wanted to...apologize?" Kyouka's eyebrow raised higher. "I-it's just, um, since Mineta got expelled, I've been thinking, and I realized what I said on the first day probably sounded...I mean, probably was, really creepy? I don't remember it exactly, but, uh, he said something about how lucky we were to have a such a bunch of pretty girls in class, and I agreed with him, but I realized that uh...he probably meant it in a little different way than I did, because I really didn't mean to be creepy, but also I know what I meant doesn't matter, and, um, I'm really sorry if I came off like a creep, I swear I would never do anything like he did, and I didn't mean to, uh..."

Izuku felt a little bad for him at that point. His apology was rambling, all over the place, and very disjointed, but he could tell he really did feel bad. "It's fine, dude," Kyouka said with a snort, taking a sip of her box of apple juice. "I know you aren't like Mineta. We're cool."

A sigh of relief escaped Kaminari's lungs. "Whoo, really? Awesome," he said, some of the anxiety leaving his expression. "I, uh, really did feel bad, especially when I heard you uh...you know..."

"I you know?"

"You *know*..." Kaminari stressed, forehead crinkling. "Don't...like guys..." Kyouka's eyebrow raised again. "I-I mean, I like girls, a-and guys too? A-and I just felt really bad I might've made you feel gross since, you know..."

Kyouka's face relaxed again. She looked a bit amused, and cracked a small smile. "Oh. I get it. It's fine, Kaminari, really. We're cool, right?"

"Right," Momo said with a smile, looking proud of their "interpersonal development." "I can tell you're being genuine, Kaminari."

"Water under the bridge!" Ochako agreed.

Kaminari's eyes flitted over to him again. Izuku smiled, trying to make him feel at ease, and he visibly relaxed. "Great!" he said with a grin, pointing his thumb at where Kirishima and Bakugou sat tearing into their sandwiches. "I'm gonna get back to eating, but, uh, see you in class!"

With an awkward laugh, he jogged off, and Tsu flopped back into her seat a few moments later. Kyouka informed her of their classmate's appreciated (but still vaguely amusing) apology with a huff of a laugh.

Izuku sometimes slipped outside to spend some of his lunch hour on the grounds. He didn't know if that was technically allowed, but nobody had told him *not* to do it, so he often took little snacks to the squirrels that lived in the trees.

"Hi, Koda," he said cheerfully, spotting his classmate sitting under one of said trees cross-legged on the ground. Koda smiled, at ease and relaxed, since they saw each other more often than not, though they didn't talk much.

He bent down and sprinkled some of his nuts from lunch in the grass. A squirrel that had learned his patterns by now darted down from a branch of the tree in front of him and ran out to swipe them for itself.

Before it could take them all, it looked up and let out a few squeaks, then ran back to the tree. Izuku heard footsteps coming down the path behind him, and turned to peer over his shoulder, finding exactly who he'd been meaning to talk to coming towards them.

Awesome!

Izuku had seen enough sports festivals to know there was usually a team exercise. He, Ochako, and Mei had gotten it into their heads they could make a very effective flying team- and really, how many teams could fly? A very small percentage, statistically- but they were missing a member. But Tokoyami, due to his Quirk, was a perfect fit! Out of anyone in their class, he was best suited; he could have asked Hitoshi,

but they both had mutually and silently agreed to a little competition, and he could tell Hitoshi wanted to prove himself on his own.

"Tokoyami!" he greeted, standing up and jogging towards the other student. A flash of surprise crossed his face, but he didn't look adverse to Izuku's presence. It was kind of hard to tell sometimes, since he wasn't used to the boy's expressions. "Uh, hi! So, uh...about the Sports Festival...I kind of had a question?"

"Oh? What is it, Midoriya?"

Izuku gulped. This was the part that made him nervous. "Okay, so..." Tokoyami looked friendly enough standing there, but they just didn't talk a lot, and Izuku just hoped he didn't offend him. "So, uh, I promise I'm not asking you this because your head looks like a bird!"

Not a great start.

Tokoyami's eyebrow quirked. Izuku felt like slapping himself in the face. "I mean, uh," he started to ramble, briefly covering his eyes with his fingers. "About the Sports Festival! Every year, there's a team exercise, and Uraraka and I can both float, you know? And we have this friend in the Support department that has hover equipment, so, obviously, we thought it would be beneficial to form a flying team, but we'd still be missing a member, assuming we can all place into the second exercise, and I was thinking...your Quirk would be perfect! Dark Shadow, I mean- you could attack or defend from any direction, including above and below, and it lets you go hands-free, so we thought, it could work really well if you teamed up with us!...what do you think?"

"That's...not what I was expecting," Tokoyami informed him honestly, but he wasn't saying no. "Are you so sure there will be a team event?"

"Well, sort of? I kind of...taped every Sports Festival ever since I was big enough to watch. There's always *something* that tests teamwork. I mean, feel free to say no, I would totally understand! I just think your skills would fit really well with ours."

"...Hm. You may be right," Tokoyami said, folding his arms and tapping one bicep thoughtfully. "All right, then. Should we all make it to that stage, I agree to team up with you. What is this friend of yours' name?"

Izuku let out a rattled laugh. "Oh, well...about that friend...just, um, be prepared..."

Izuku knew he should have probably been trying to move past things that had already happened, trying to forgive and forget, but he just...didn't like being around Bakugou.

He still remembered what the other boy had said about jumping off the roof. Bakugou didn't seem to, at all, ignoring him most of their days if he wasn't yelling at him. However, Izuku just couldn't get it out of his brain. Aizawa had said he didn't care where they sat, at one point, when Kaminari asked, wanting to switch his own seat, and Izuku had taken the excuse to sit elsewhere, instead of right behind his middle school bully. Usually he sat in between Momo and Ochako with Tenya on his side, or Tsuyu if they switched it up. And he still jumped whenever Bakugou made an explosion, too, which made him feel weak.

Ochako was the only one who really noticed. Izuku tried very hard to keep it under wraps, after all, because he didn't want to make things harder for Bakugou than necessary or make a big deal out of it. Even still, she gave them frowns sometimes, clearly suspecting something was up, and had stopped using that nickname- Deku- even though she thought it was cute, when it became apparent there was some type of past between them.

But she didn't ask after he said he didn't want to talk about it. Izuku appreciated that.

"Are you kidding? I'm *so* gonna win this fuckin' festival," he heard Kacchan snort from somewhere ahead of them in the hall as they headed to lunch, and the familiar tone made him flinch. Bakugou wasn't even talking to him, but it sounded like every time he'd gloated in junior high and told Izuku that he would never make it.

Ochako frowned at him. She didn't say anything, but she slipped her hand into his, and gave it a squeeze. Izuku wouldn't admit it, but he was glad she did, and he held onto her hand until they got to the lunch line. It was nice, for once, to have someone be on *his* side.

Hitoshi, on the other hand, took one look at Bakugou in the cafeteria and easily made the connection after seeing how Izuku acted around him. It was a mirror image of the bullies from his own previous schools, after all, who hadn't been scared enough by his Quirk to leave him alone. He thought Bakugou was an asshole, and said so, and even though Izuku always urged him to hush up he couldn't help but think that was nice too.

Someone being on his side, and willing to stand up for him, and liking him instead of Kacchan.

"That guy is a fucking asshole."

Someone who saw how Izuku felt. Who saw how Bakugou thought about him, even if Bakugou himself wasn't consciously doing anything.

That was nice.

"I swear I tried this time," Kaminari groaned into his arms, folded over on his desk, bemoaning his fate of another paper graded with a bright blue 'D'. Mic-sensei had a bunch of colored pens he used to grade, though he tried to avoid red, and he always left encouraging feedback and notes on even the worst of papers, but Izuku figured it must have been discouraging to have gotten five D's in a row. The only reason Kaminari even got a D, this time, was because of the five bonus points Hizashi had given him because he'd "clearly put a lot of effort in!"

"Mom's gonna kill me," Kaminari continued to mutter, so downtrodden Izuku had been planning on saying something before their teacher strolled over.

"What's up, listener?"

Kaminari lifted his head and grimaced. Mic-sensei looked at him with a friendly smile, and he held up his graded paper, looking somewhere between apologetic and guilty. "I'm sorry, sensei. I swear I *tried*!"

"Well, I could see that," Present Mic replied. "It was even longer than the word requirement this time! Have you thought about tutoring, my guy? It's not bad to have weaknesses, we're all strong at some things and less strong in others."

"I've tried tutoring," Kaminari mumbled, which made Mic frown a little. "My last tutor said I was too stupid to help and left before she even got paid."

"Well, *that's* not right," Mic said with pursed lips, planting his hands on his hips. "You are *not* stupid, and getting a few bad grades doesn't mean you aren't intelligent."

Kaminari sighed.

"How about you swing by the staff room with your draft next time so I can look it over before you turn it in?"

Izuku could see Kaminari gnawing on his lower lip from his own seat. "I guess...it's just hard, you know? Sometimes I just can't find the words, or it gets all jumbled up in my head before I even finish my sentence..."

Izuku saw Present Mic pause. "Say, listener, have you ever seen anyone about your problems with writing?"

"Seen anyone? No...?"

"How about this- do you mix up letters and words sometimes, or have trouble remembering how they sound out loud? How about math, you have trouble there too?"

"...yeah? How'd you know?"

"It's not anything bad, listener, but I think it'll make learning easier on you. How about we take a trip to the school's counselor together?"

It may not have been for *him*, but Izuku saw a teacher going out of his way to help a student- even got the sense Mic-sensei actually enjoyed reading their papers, with how excited his comments on them got- and every part of him appreciated it. Maybe his teachers, for once in his life, were all decent people, and he could trust them. There had been a student in his fifth grade class with undiagnosed dyslexia, and she'd had a tough time with practically all their assignments, because their teacher didn't care enough to even ask why she got a bad grade- but Mic-sensei, he cared.

Shouto Todoroki was one person Izuku really hadn't talked to. Like, at all.

The boy didn't really talk to *anyone*, simply coming and going from class with his typical neutral expression, but it made Izuku feel a little bad. Pretty much everyone else in class had made friends, even Bakugou, who tolerated Kirishima and Mina even if he didn't even know their names; Izuku didn't want anyone to feel left out. That was why, after they'd been let out of school one afternoon, he made his way through the crowd of students outside with one of the popsicles he'd noticed Todoroki got from the vending machines and always ate discreetly.

"Hey, Todoroki!"

The boy paused, looking briefly surprised someone was talking to him, and turned around with a raised eyebrow. It was enough to make Izuku gulp. *Man, he really is like a stone wall...* "Here," he said cheerfully, holding out the frozen treat as Todoroki took it from him seemingly on reflex and frowned minutely. "I noticed you like these!"

"Why'd you get me one?" Todoroki asked, confused frown still in place.

"Um, because you like them?"

"But why? There's no reason to spend your own money on it," Todoroki countered, perturbed.

Izuku honestly had no good answer. He just wanted to be friendly, and maybe make friends. "Uh...I just want you to feel welcome, that's all!"

"Oh." Todoroki's face returned to normal, which meant he was showing nothing at all, and Izuku felt a bead of sweat trickle down his neck. "Thank you. However, you do not need to buy things for me." He didn't look thankful at all. He didn't look mad, either, but still.

"Well, I know I don't *need* to, but it's just a...friendly gesture..."

"I appreciate it, but it's unnecessary," Todoroki told him, like his words were practiced, and started walking again. "I'm not here to make friends."

There was a low whistle as Hitoshi passed him, at first going unnoticed by him, but the sound made Todoroki pause again and glance back, a small furrow in his brow as Hitoshi merely grinned dully and went, "Boy, *that's* not the thing to say."

Izuku refrained from rolling his eyes with a small huff. "Shut up," he muttered as Hitoshi snickered, falling into step beside him as they headed out, going a different way than Todoroki did. He didn't really feel like he'd accomplished much, but still, he wanted to try.

"If you're picking up on some battered kid syndrome, you're probably right, so am I," Hitoshi said, casually, always lackadaisical about that kind of thing, and Izuku actually slapped his forehead this time. He let out a sigh that made Hitoshi snicker at him again.

"I'm telling you, the answer is 88.62*6*, not 88.62*5*," Tenya ranted, hand chopping thin air. "Because of the factor of-"

Izuku resisted the urge to groan and slam his head into the table as Tenya and Momo debated the tiniest detail of the last problem on their algebra sheet. He didn't think it really mattered- couldn't they just leave it at 88.62?- but he knew saying that would just stir the fires of their argument even more.

"I disagree," Momo said, twirling her pencil in hand as she started on her own explanation. Tenya's glasses shone in the light as he sat there with folded arms, a thoughtful frown on his face as he considered what she was saying.

Izuku saw Ectoplasm staring at them from the teacher's podium with a hesitant grimace on his face. He didn't really fault him for it. Anyone would have been intimidated by the thought of trying to break up one of Tenya's and Momo's great math debates.

Ochako moaned beside him. "Guys, why don't we just round it?"

"It's important to be precise, Ochako!" Tenya exclaimed with another wave of his hand. "What if this were a matter of life or death?!"

"Pretty sure math is never going to be," Ochako mumbled.

Izuku's eyes lingered on Todoroki across the room. He was sitting by himself, staring blankly as he did his work, like usual.

"Izuku? Is everything all right?"

He looked up and saw Momo peering at him. They'd all turned their desks into a circle to work together, and she sat directly across from him. He sighed. "I just feel a little bad," he admitted. "I feel like Todoroki is kind of, lonely? I want to make friends with him, but I don't really know how..."

Tenya glanced across the room and frowned, adjusting his glasses. "Well, that is an admirable goal, but you cannot fault yourself if he isn't responsive. I am sure he will loosen up as the semester continues!"

"Yeah, maybe so," Momo agreed. "I think people from families like his can just feel distanced for a while, but I think he'll take a liking to the class after a bit more time."

"Yeah, I guess," Izuku sighed, and glanced at the clock. Only a few more minutes left to listen to their math problem woes. Still, for a few moments, he could see his words were bouncing around in all their brains as they sat there in silence. He hoped Todoroki did feel more welcomed as time went on.

...actually, it surely wouldn't hurt to try and learn more about him to help make him feel more welcomed, would it?

Izuku made a mental note to try and do just that when he went home. It may have to wait after the Sports Festival, only a week away, as he and Ochako had been training together for several hours after school now to prepare, but he would get around to it.

Chapter End Notes

> p.s. I'm commenting from the future after posting chapter 27 to say fucking STOP posting comments just about the fucking math joke at the end here!!!! you have no idea how many people comment solely to comment on that shit, and that's NOT a review of the story. I'm not talking about joking about it in passing, like some people did..I mean people who Literally comment ONLY to complain about it. just today someone left an insanely long comment complaining about how an imaginary math problem they couldn't even see was wrong, and yall, it's a fucking J O K E, the joke is they're all getting different answers, let it GO. sorry if I sound mean here, but I've had it up to my neck with this.

Izuku Midoriya Eats Steak

"So this is class 1A," was the first thing Hitoshi said when he peered into their room. "I heard you guys were impressive, but you just sound like an ass. Is everyone in the hero course delusional, or just you?"

Izuku was honestly torn between screaming out a laugh, squeaking, and frantically telling Hitoshi to shut up, so he settled on covering his mouth and breathing heavily into it while waving one hand. He ended up saying nothing, merely watching Bakugou leave in a huff, while Hitoshi headed out after just leaving a vaguely ominous impression on the rest of the class. Classic Hitoshi, if he was going to be honest. He was picking up more of Aizawa-sensei's behavior than he would admit.

That Friday came sooner than he expected, as he and Ochako practiced their floating and he had a few spars with Tokoyami to give him some rudimentary hand to hand knowledge in case they needed to fight to reach each other. Before he knew it, though, he was standing and listening to Midnight announce for them, being all jovial for the cameras, and he felt a shiver go down his spine.

There were *so many* people up in the stands.

And of course Kacchan had to walk up and make some big announcement that he would win and make them a target for everyone there. Izuku found himself wincing as other students booed, and ignored the concerned frown Ochako gave him.

"The first event will be a race!" Midnight yelled, waving her whip like it was a flag. "All students, get into position!"

Okay, okay, focus. A race. Good. Good. That was good. It meant no one would be fighting each other, though interfering may still be in the picture, and as long as they all made it...

Breathe in. They were at the starting line now.

Breathe out. All of them tense and ready.

Breathe in.

"Start!" Midnight howled, a buzzer going off.

Almost immediately, Todoroki shot off to the front of the crowd as ice

covered the ground at his feet. Most of the other students let out surprised squawks and cries of indignation as they tried to move their feet, but Izuku had seen that familiar sparkle ahead and known what was coming. He pushed off from the ground as hard as he could, catapulting himself through the air, and twisted as he did, sending two black tendrils out as far as he could.

Ochako and Tokoyami didn't even need him to yell. They hadn't known what kind of event they'd be facing, so they hadn't been able to make concrete plans, but they'd all agreed to help each other if they could. Tokoyami pushed off with the help of Dark Shadow, and Ochako followed behind, floating into the sky, and they grabbed ahold of his extensions of Black Whip.

Perfect, Izuku thought, turning back around and holding onto the main tendril with his other hand. He pushed himself forward, subtly, with Float, not wanting to let on that he could fly yet, and looked for a spot to land.

"*Look at that, folks!"* Mic screamed over the loud speakers. "*Todoroki comes out with a strong start, but it looks like three of our hero hopefuls have already got a plan in store!"*

As if fate was helping him out, with a large burst of smoke several of the giant robot models from the entrance exam exited out onto the field, giving him the perfect landing point. Izuku came down on the shoulder of one, pulling Tokoyami and Ochako down, and let go of them. They each took off, scrambling across the robots- too large and unwieldy to do anything about a few small students on their heads- while the students behind them in the race tried to figure out a way past.

He activated Full Cowling as he went, leaping from one robot to the next, and the trio converged at the edge of the last one. Ochako folded her hands together and formed a concentrated expression, before placing a hand on Tokoyami, making them both weightless for Izuku to grab onto and leap with. He went sailing ahead, landing safely with them, and they pressed forward to the next obstacle.

"*DEKU!"* he heard in the distance, no doubt Kacchan upset by his early lead, and it made him wince.

"Well done! The students are making their way past the villain bots! And it looks like Midoriya, Uraraka, and Tokoyami have formed an unspoken alliance! Who would've guessed?!"

Izuku caught Todoroki glancing back at them with narrowed eyes. Gulping, he decided to just focus on getting past the tight ropes. Making herself weightless, Ochako went bounding across one, subtly giving herself enough weight back to come bouncing back down but not enough to make the line waver too much.

"Midoriya, here!" Tokoyami called out, Dark Shadow snaking over to him. Izuku took a running start and jumped, bouncing easily off of the other boy's Quirk creature and sailing over one of the chasms. He reached back with Black Whip to take Tokoyami with him, and that was how they went across the second obstacle.

By now, other students were starting to catch up- he could see Mei soaring above them with a laugh that echoed around the whole arena. He could also still hear Bakugou yelling and letting off explosions, which didn't do much for his peace of mind, but he tried to ignore it.

He hit the ground running when they came to the mine field area. They were close enough now that he had to be confident Ochako and Tokoyami could make it on their own; he had to make sure he didn't fall behind, as he was integral to how they would maneuver in the air. Instantly, however, he noticed something; the mines were laid out close enough together that running across wouldn't work, and it slowed everyone down- though Todoroki was icing his way across- and as he came to a stop, students started to streak past him.

Hmm...

A loud explosion near his ear startled him quite badly. Bakugou screamed past him, mouth open in a wordless shout, and he flinched.

"Take that, Deku!"

Go right ahead, Izuku thought, eyeing him for just a moment before he started to dig with a part of Black Whip formed into a roughly shovel-shaped blob. *If you want first so bad, Kacchan.*

He started to dig up the mines. Might as well take a leaf from Bakugou's notebook and blast right to the front.

When he had a big enough pile, he let some of the black energy out and into a larger blob to shield him, and he jumped right onto it.

"*Whoo!"* Present Mic screamed as he went soaring, shooting past all the competitors. *"Midoriya comes up fast on those in the lead-!"*

He slammed the tendril of Black Whip down, right in between those two idiots who had nothing but the finish line in mind, and set off an explosion that made both Bakugou and Todoroki pause.

Full Cowling crackled into existence, and he ran.

"DEKU-!"

"Midoriya is nearing the finish! Who will come in first?! Closer, closer-!"

Izuku came out of the tunnel and stopped inches from the finish line.

Bakugou was screaming his name when he came soaring out, eyes going wide when he realized who he'd been focused on was just *standing there,* and Izuku took a leisurely step across the finish line, smiling.

"HUH?" Mic screeched. *"Are my eyes working?! Midoriya just came in second- on purpose! Eraser, what is UP with your kiddo?!"*

"He made a rational deduction, which other students might have noticed if they thought about anything other than coming in first," Aizawa's dry voice replied, sounding both tired and annoyed but also a little proud. It made warmth blossom in Izuku's chest.

"Bakugou places first!" Midnight yelled into her mic, waving her whip. Bakugou himself had come to a stop, and he'd turned, and it was the first time Izuku had ever seen him look more confused than angry.

When Midnight said that whoever came in first got a ten million-point headband, the students around him, all still confused as to why he'd willingly given up a first-place spot, started murmuring to themselves and each other. Izuku spotted a few people from 1B looking at him, looking both perturbed and curious, and he'd seemed to catch the gaze of a familiar-looking blond boy, who looked caught between impressed and a little insulted, for some reason.

"How did he know?" someone whispered, followed up by another voice saying "I think he knows *everything*."

"YOU KNEW THIS WOULD HAPPEN, DIDN'T YOU, DEKU?" Bakugou yelled from across the arena, being restrained by Kirishima and practically smoking. No, he was literally smoking, that was literal smoke coming from his hands. "YOU DID THIS ON PURPOSE, DIDN'T YOU? BASTARD!"

"Gee, he's pleasant," Mei said cheerfully, adjusting the jetpack she'd put on Tokoyami.

"Now then!" Midnight yelled. "Form your teams!"

The four of them were clustered together off to the side, on their own, clearly a team already. Mei hadn't even waited to start getting her equipment ready. She gave Ochako hover boots and Tokoyami a jetpack to support him just in case they all had to let go of him.

Izuku again caught several fearful glances being thrown their way. He really didn't understand why- it wasn't that hard to guess what was going to happen during the Festival and plan for it! Honestly, he was a little disappointed with some of the students' ingenuity.

"All right, you got it?"

"I believe so," Tokoyami answered Mei with a nod, placing his hand on a button on his pack. "This is to activate it, this is for a general hover, this one activates the power for a boost, and this for the emergency parachute."

"Perfect! We're good to go!"

Everyone around them had split off by now. Izuku spotted Tenya and Momo with Todoroki, and he had to restrain a smile. Maybe he was warming up to others, if he was willing to work with them!

"One, two, three, hee-yup!" Ochako said cheerily as they boosted Tokoyami to sit on their shoulders. He joined a hand with Ochako, and felt a warmness spread through him. Kacchan didn't matter, he told himself. He had friends now, real ones, and that was what mattered.

They could do this.

"Teams, assemble!" Midnight yelled. "Get ready! On my count!"

Ochako squeezed his hand. It was a little embarrassing, but Izuku had gotten rather attached to her in a short amount of time. She could probably comfort him better than anyone other than his mother.

"One!"

That warm feeling spread to his hand. It was just the adrenaline, he figured, and Ochako's body heat mingling with his.

"Two!"

He'd never actually held hands with anyone before UA. His thumb was brushing against Tokoyami's ankle, solidly in their grip, and the boy's skin was cool.

"Start!"

Tokoyami pressed the power trigger. They shot into the air with a whir, Mei letting out a loud howl as they did, her own hover boots and Ochako's activating in sync. A pink glow spread down Ochako's arm, over to him, over to Mei where Ochako's other hand was touching her, up to Tokoyami.

Ochako let out a laugh as they shot high into the sky. The people in the stands, not expecting them to gain altitude so quickly, let out sounds of surprise, leaning back in their seats even though their team was still squarely in the arena airspace. "This is amazing!" she yelled. "I feel so light, like I could float anything!" It really did feel effortless- her extra training must have been paying off. (Little did she know, it wasn't just her extra training, but they would all find that out in time.)

Izuku glanced down at where the other teams were gaping up at them and grinned.

"*WHOO!"* Mic screamed. Izuku had to look *down* to see the announcer's booth. "*TEAM TOKOYAMI WITH A STRONG START AGAIN! Looks like Uraraka's been training hard with her Quirk!"*

Ochako beamed. Izuku found himself smiling too, thinking that they could- theoretically- simply stay up there with their added headbands and still place into the final round.

They weren't going to, of course, but still. They could, in theory.

He heard a vague *fucking Deku* down below. Bakugou was already blasting off, targeting Todoroki's team, and it quickly devolved into chaos.

The people on the ground were first priority. No one thought they were going to come back down, since they could fly- that was their first mistake. The second was starting to ignore them because they were in the air. Out of sight, out of mind.

"All right, Ochako, start a descent," Izuku instructed, feeling a thrill run through him. He helped to support and guide them as they went,

slowly and carefully.

Even Present Mic was busy commentating on the other teams' action. Izuku idly looked around for Hitoshi, wondering where he'd gotten off to, but he couldn't spot him in the fray. Oh, well, the boy was very good at hiding in plain sight.

His eyes fell on Bakugou as he came crashing back down into his team's arms after an unsuccessful lunge at Todoroki. "You guys ready?" Izuku asked, referring to this part of the plan they'd discussed while they got ready.

"Ready and hoping this doesn't backfire!" Ochako returned happily.

"Go get im, tiger!" Mei chirped.

Tokoyami nodded solemnly.

"All right. I'm letting go."

Then he detached, floating in midair, and felt his cheeks warm when part of the audience shouted in delight.

"*And- what's this?! Team Tokoyami just lost a member- and I don't mean by falling! Midoriya is flying, folks! Just how many powers does he have?!*"

"*His Quirk is a source of energy,*" Aizawa, blessedly, cut in, saving him from too much scrutiny. *"It allows him to spread it throughout his body, concentrate it into tangible forms, or radiate it from him in such a manner he can float.*"

Just "floating," as the name suggested, had become easy by now. Actually "flying" was a little trickier. Even still, Izuku had set it up so he had a straight shot, didn't have to make any complicated turns, and only needed high speed for two runs. He could go fast- *very* fast- if it was just in one direction.

He lined it up, activated Full Cowling, aimed, and was off like the bullet from a gun-

-Streaking past Bakugou, and stealing the ten million point band right off his head.

The crowd *screamed*. Bakugou turned, as if in slow motion, watching him with wide eyes, and Izuku couldn't contain a wide grin as he held that coveted headband in his own hand. He didn't stop, however,

merely paused and then shot upward, blocking Kyouka's earphone jacks and vines that came up from the ground to try and catch him with Black Whip combined with Full Cowling. He flew too high for anyone to reach, again, and then started making his way back to where his team was hovering.

"*HOLY SMOKES, FOLKS! MIDORIYA OF TEAM TOKOYAMI JUST STOLE THE TEN MILLION POINTER OUT OF TEAM BAKUGOU'S* GRASP!"

"Mental high-five, 'Zuku, mental high-five!" Mei yelled, busy with holding onto Tokoyami, grinning like a shark at him. He floated up and fitted the headband around a smiling Tokoyami's neck.

"What a mad banquet of darkness."

Izuku let out a giggle as he slotted himself back into place. The warmth in his hand returned. Ochako let out a small sigh, as if floating had become a little bit easier.

He turned his eyes to Bakugou. It had been a stupid thing to do, he knew, stealing from *Bakugou*, but they needed that headband. They couldn't just hover in the air the entire time- they had to show off, had to show they had drive and a competitive spirit.

The other boy was standing there, like a statue, or perhaps a pot getting ready to boil over, as there was steam rising from his palms as his body shook. Kirishima looked concerned, head tilted back to look at him, then he yelped and nearly undid their formation when Bakugou let out two identical explosions and *screamed.*

"DEKU! I'll FUCKING KILL YOU! I'M COMING FOR YOU, DEKU!"

"We've got half the time left," Ochako said, sounding a little worried as she eyed the explosive student below them. She knew Bakugou was loud, but how he was acting now seemed *way* over the top. Especially since he was supposed to be childhood friends with Izuku.

I don't think he likes Izuku that much. Not at all.

And she'd known that for a while, but she hadn't thought he didn't like him enough to actually want to hurt him.

Now, she wasn't so sure.

"It'll be fine," Izuku assured, trying to sound confident. He pulled them

to the side to dodge an attack from a 1B team, knowing Ochako couldn't guide them quickly enough.

Every so often, someone did make an attempt to get them out of the air, but they failed each time, either because they dodged it or Dark Shadow defended them. Izuku had been right- Tokoyami had the absolute perfect Quirk for their team. Dark Shadow was ideal for defending from below; it might've just been the adrenaline, but he seemed...larger, able to go farther, more vicious, somehow. Maybe it was just Izuku's imagination.

He adjusted the grip he had on Tokoyami's ankle.

"DEKU!" Bakugou screamed at one point, using his explosions to vault his way towards them, but Dark Shadow screamed and barreled into him head-on, barely flinching when it got an explosion to the face. Even Todoroki tried to get at them at one point, but he must have realized it was futile, as he didn't try again.

Things continued that way until the end bell sounded.

Ochako and Mei looked happy when they descended to the ground and started to mingle. Dark Shadow seemed content as well, as he refused to stop nuzzling into Izuku's neck for a solid minute while Tokoyami hissed at him to stop in embarrassment. Izuku could see Bakugou across the arena, glaring at him with the passion of a thousand suns, though his team was clustered around him probably convincing him not to start something and get kicked out.

Even Mic was surprised that Hitoshi's team had passed. Izuku hadn't noticed him gaining points, but he had on that typical Aizawa-like smug grin, while his teammates looked confused and jarred. Izuku rolled his eyes at that.

"Good luck in the next round, to all of you," Tokoyami said as they stood there on the grass, getting ready to file inside for a short break before a tournament round started. "Though I understand the point of it, I still find it disappointing, in a way, we cannot fight together the entire time."

"Aww, you too, Tokoyami," Ochako gushed, making him look away with a look that seemed like he'd be blushing if Izuku could see his skin.

Izuku stuck close to her side as they headed in. Somehow, he didn't

want to get caught alone with Bakugou at any point in the next three days.

Of *course* he got stuck with fighting Hitoshi first.

"Midoriya, be careful with him," Ojiro whispered to him beforehand. "If you answer any of his questions, he'll have control over you!"

"Uh, yeah, I know?" Izuku replied, confused. "I know him...he's like one of my best friends?"

Ojiro just stared at him in response. Then he turned and crept away from him.

"Go easy on me, OP?" Hitoshi mocked him with a grin, stretching out his arms. Izuku rolled his eyes in response.

"Begin!" Midnight yelled.

Hitoshi came at him with surprising speed. Their silent agreement to a competition meant Izuku didn't activate his Quirk, only lowered himself into a defensive stance and twisted around his first attack. They *both* wanted to see who would win with no Quirks.

He got a feeling the crowd was surprised as they started to fight, using only hand to hand skills, bouncing around the arena like two balls in a pinball machine. Hitoshi managed to toss him at one point, but he landed on his feet, lunging and taking out the other boy's legs directly after. They rolled, and Hitoshi got him off with a kick to the face that left his chin bleeding; he jumped in again and went for a strike to Hitoshi's kneecaps, only to be blocked and thrown to the side. He got in a good kick to Hitoshi's ribs that sent him reeling for a minute, but it was followed up by a strike that barely missed his collarbone a moment later.

It was feral, frankly, and a little frightening to some of those watching who'd been expecting a flashier fight with less...grittiness and blood.

"*...aaaaaand Midoriya and Shinsou start off with a vicious hand to hand fight! Who would've guessed they were so evenly matched?! And it seems Midoriya is as light on his feet without his Quirk as he is with it! Eraserhead, I've been told you've given some approved tutoring to them both! Who d'you have your money on to win?!*"

"Neither. The winner should feel accomplished but not cocky enough to lose

progress. The loser should just take this as another lesson moving forward."

"...what a boring teacher response."

Aizawa's hilarious offended growl after that almost made Izuku trip up. Hitoshi grinned at him, knowing they were probably pissing off Bakugou more, and broke a tile in half where one of his kicks landed.

"Aren't you the one who called me a terrible teacher?"

"That was then, this is now! And right now, neither seems to be giving and both seem determined to rip the other's face off! What HAVE you been teaching them, Eraser?"

Izuku broke and let out a little laugh. Hitoshi shot forward and nailed him in the gut, then flipped him over his shoulder, and Izuku realized in a brief moment of panic he was about to go sailing off the side.

He stopped a few inches from the grass. Then, he floated back into the arena bounds.

"I win," Hitoshi called over to him, stretching his neck as he smirked and circled back over to him. "You broke first."

Izuku stuck his tongue out at him. "In that case," he said, and activated Full Cowling. Instantly, Hitoshi's eyes widened in an *oh shit* gesture.

He put up a pretty good fight, comparatively, but it still took less than a minute for Izuku to push him out of bounds with Full Cowling active. He technically won, but he still felt frustrated he hadn't won their real fight. He walked over and held out his hand to help Hitoshi up afterwards, getting an eye-roll in response as Aizawa continued to bicker overhead.

They headed for the stands together, silently agreeing they now had bait to mock their teacher over.

The matches went as expected afterwards. Todoroki was obviously going to win his fight with Sero. Kaminari was too unpracticed, and Shiozaki had a Quirk effective against his. Mei's performance was...well, easy to predict. Tenya should have never let her deck him out in her gear. Aoyama was also very inexperienced when it came to hand to hand fighting, so Mina winning wasn't surprising. Now, Momo did have a useful Quirk, but Dark Shadow was just too pumped up

from the previous round and strong for her to counter well enough. Kirishima and Tetsutetsu had such similar Quirks that just beating each other up was the only thing that could have happened.

Izuku didn't notice, but the faces of those who didn't know him well around him got more and more nervous as the matches went on. He didn't know it, but it was because of him; how he muttered loudly enough for everyone to hear, every little detail and calculation that flitted into his brain, how precisely he measured how the matches would go, how every one of his predictions came true. How he seemed to know about Quirks even from other classes. How he knew the names of people he'd never met or spoken to before. How he knew *exactly* the right strategy to take- and how he theorized out loud about how someone could have won despite the odds.

Coupled with his performance, showing off just how many powers he had, streaking across the obstacle course like it was as easy as a light jog, his impressive speed in the air, his vicious fight with Hitoshi showing he didn't even need his Quirk to fight- including, to those eyes sharp enough to see it, the fact he was *trying* to hold back- it was all a little terrifying. Even if he wasn't completely refined, his potential was showing, and it was great. The blond from earlier peeked over the partition separating class A and B and looked about to say something before staring at him ranting for a while and slowly easing back down.

It was almost one o'clock, and predictably, the last match of the first round came up on screen, keeping to schedule. He glanced up and felt his heart drop into his stomach. He glanced quickly at Ochako, who looked quite pensive, and at Bakugou, who sat at the very end of the row, farthest away from him, looking stormy. He may have qualified for the third round, but he still wasn't happy about how it had happened.

The screen said Ochako and Bakugou were up next.

He whipped back around to look at his friend. "Just, um," he muttered, anxious. "Be careful."

Ochako stood up from her seat and looked down at him with an oddly determined expression. "I'll be fine," she said, emphatic, and turned to march down to the arena.

I'll beat him.

I'll beat him so Izuku doesn't have to.

[12:57 p.m.]

nedzu

nedzuuuuuu

NEDZuuuuuuuu

nedZUUUUU

my man. my guy. my super pal. respected god on earth among petty mortals

come on nedzu i'm watching the sports festival

you won't answer ur favorite no. 3??? :((((((((((

you didn't tell me you have a FLYING student this year!!

come on how often do we get students who can FLY??

AND go at those speeds???

AND aren't dumb????

i'll tell u for u: almost never!

come OOONNN nedz i want him

i know ur just sitting in ur office drinking leaf water right now

please? can i finally have a wittle intern?? pwease??? i swear i'm responsible

ok ok i get it i'm being too pushy. i get it. but i'll send my offer in triplicate just in case!

it would be great publicity!! :))

[2:28 p.m.]

NEDZU OH MY GOD PLEASE DID YOU SEE THAT ON TV

some time after...

[UA hell space]

present lunchables: i think midoriya almost cried when all might hugged him

twelve: I thought it was cute :)

rated R for all audiences: I was closest. :) I saw a shimmer. :) It was adorable. :) I got a picture. :)

mummyman: stop embarrassing my student where he can't hear

present lunchables: you just said it he can't?? hear??

mummyman: but he *knows*. don't you see him cringing

rated R for all audiences: That's so cute you know things like that!

mummyman: shut up.

Cementoss: It was rather wholesome! However, I also noticed that moment where he tripped in his fight with young Shinsou was when you were teasing Aizawa, Yamada. I was sitting at such an angle I could see him laugh. I think they were both rather amused. :)

present lunchables: HAH

mummyman: i can't wait until i can get out of this fucking speaker box hell with you

Snipe: I overheard them talking in the stands. I think no one recognized me due to me not wearing my mask. Midoriya was rather disappointed Shinsou couldn't use his "capture weapon," because he would have looked "just like Aizawa-sensei" which would have been "so cool." Shinsou was amicably jealous Midoriya has one "built in." Is that what the kids call "mini me"?

mummyman: i. hate

present lunchables: hahahahaha he just tossed his phone on the floor and put his head on the desk up here

rated R for all audiences: hey @AllMight get in here and look at these pics

rated R for all audiences sent four attachments

twelve: OH THAT'S ADORABLE

rated R for all audiences: how can he be so scary and so cute simultaneously?

AllMight: Oh my

Power Loader: awww look at the little sprout. sure you don't have a secret kid all might?

rated R for all audiences: secret? what do you mean? he and aizawa are clearly co parenting

AllMight: Please

Snipe: How does custody work here?

AllMight: Mr. Snipe

present lunchables: i'm saying 60/40 for aizawa because he's more responsible

rated R for all audiences: that's fair

Overlord: Please do carry on with bullying All Might and Aizawa, but please note I'd like a faculty meeting at six tonight to discuss a possible transfer into the hero course! In case you were wondering, it's Aizawa's other child in question. :)

rated R for all audiences: what about custody for that one?

present lunchables: 100 because he barely speaks to any other teachers and his foster home isn't much

rated R for all audiences: how do YOU know that?

present lunchables: i'm the english teacher, people tell me everything

mummyman: would you all please stop bombing my phone already

mummyman: wait what do you mean by his foster home isn't much?

present lunchables: he just said he wasn't happy there and his folks don't pay him much attention

mummyman: and why didn't you inform me of this SOONER?

present lunchables: calm down dude i just learned this yesterday it

was during a talk about why fairy tales suck because they give you false expectations about life

rated R for all audiences: in real life adoption incoming the joke is becoming reality

Overlord: I advise against talking of such matters further in the faculty chatroom for legal reasons, but please do come see me, Yamada, Aizawa, after the festivities have finished.

present lunchables: yes overlord

Like A Lioness

Ochako knew, as she walked down to the arena, that she was pretty much screwed. Bakugou was probably the worst possible match to get out of everyone there. It was just her luck that she was the first person to get him as an opponent. And he'd had all this time to rest up, too, after the cavalry battle.

He was stronger than her, smart, and had a better Quirk for fighting, so really, all the odds were stacked against her. Some part of her brain was aware it looked as if she had no conceivable way of winning.

A smaller, more conniving part that sounded suspiciously like Izuku told her there was *always* a way to win. He had traced out a way every student so far could have won their matches. Raw power- that wasn't the only thing that mattered. If she could be like Izuku, if she could outsmart Bakugou, she could win. She knew she could.

She had to.

Maybe she wouldn't have felt as calm and determined as she did as she stepped up onto the stage if it weren't for Izuku. A giant chunk of her was *screaming* out at her to just keep Bakugou *away* from him, even though she knew Izuku was strong and knew he could handle himself; she had noticed every time he winced or got nervous or became quiet because of Bakugou, noticed every time he retreated back into his shell because of the other boy. So what if Izuku could take a punch and dish it out too? That part of her insisting she protect her friend said there were things more important than fighting, things like people's feelings.

He's just so mean to him for no reason!

Izuku had stood up for her and the other girls when Mineta mistreated them. She wanted to stand up for her friend too.

He just looks down on him, and calls him that stupid nickname!

She was *there.* She *saw* it. How could she just ignore it? Maybe she had decided to become a hero for the income, but how could she even dare to call herself one if she didn't protect her friend's feelings?

She *couldn't* fail. She couldn't allow Bakugou into the next round. She couldn't allow him to fight Izuku in the matches.

Bully. Bully. Bully.

Bully.

If no one else would, Ochako would protect her friend.

A lot of things slotted into place in the space of a moment, a moment when Midnight dropped her whip and called for the match to start, and Bakugou narrowed his eyes at her and got ready to fight.

Bully.

It all made sense.

A rush of pure rage overpowered any lingering fears she had. She sprinted forward, a scowl set deep into her face, and kept low to the ground, hands out.

I won't let him hurt Izuku ever again!

Bakugou blasted her back. She had been expecting it, and rolled on her landing like Aizawa had taught her while she trained with him and Izuku to soften the blow. And so she did, again and again and again, while Bakugou never noticed the rubble floating away in the dust.

"Seriously, come on!" a voice yelling in the stands shouted. "Don't let him bully the poor girl!"

Ochako nearly screamed then and there. *I'm not the one he bullied!* How could no one have ever seen? How could they look at a match and feel sorry for her just because she was a girl and *no one had ever saved Izuku from him before?*

The voice of her sensei came over the speakers to chastise the Pro who'd yelled. She barely heard him, rushing at Bakugou and hardly feeling the bruises as they piled up.

I won't let you through to him!

"Hah!" Bakugou sent her sailing back with an open palm, glaring at her like she'd personally insulted him. "Gonna have to try something else, round-face."

Twitching, Ochako stood up and took a few deep breaths, placing her hands together. Bakugou tensed up, eyeing them.

That was another disadvantage. He was taking her seriously. If he'd been as emotional as he was during the cavalry battle, he might've been easier to catch off-guard, but he was watching for any little move she made. She supposed she might've been proud of the fact she'd garnered that reaction to him in other circumstances, but right now, all she could think of was how mad she was.

A voice of reason, however, cut through the anger, sharpening it into a fine weapon.

She couldn't beat Bakugou physically, not the way she was now. So she would have to make him angry enough to lose this newfound composure of his. She just needed the right moment.

"Eat this, then!" she bit out, and let all the rubble fall.

People in the stands started to shout in surprise. Predictably, Bakugou looked up, and Ochako made her sacrificing move. It was what Izuku called it when he played chess with Shoji and said he had to make a sacrifice to distract the other player and make them underestimate him long enough so he could win. This sacrificing move was going to hurt, but it was worth it.

With a yell, she charged, and the resulting explosion from Bakugou blowing the rock away sent her slamming back into the arena tiles.

The audience was totally silent. She could hear Bakugou breathing heavily, see him holding his right wrist, and a tiny part of her crowed in victory.

Not yet.

Wiping dust from her mouth, she panted as she got to her feet and glared across the arena at him. "Well," he finally said, after a few moments of the dust clearing, "looks like you're serious, round-face. You wanna go?"

He looked up at her, with a crooked, wild grin, and she glared harder.

"You don't deserve it."

His expression dropped in surprise. He didn't know what she meant. Louder, though not so loud anyone in the stands would hear, she put a growl into her voice. "You don't deserve to win! You're a bully and a cheat! You don't deserve to even be here! You know who does? *'Deku!'* He's better than you in every way, he's smarter, more kind,

and he's beaten you all the way here! He *let* you win! He'll become a better hero than you ever will!"

Bakugou's eyes widened, almost comically, and she could see his jaw trembling. Her ranting, from his point of view, must have been coming out of left field, completely unexpected. He probably thought no one knew what he'd done. That no one had noticed. That no one liked Izuku enough to see it.

Well, he was wrong.

Bakugou's face contorted into an ugly scowl. "Shut," he said, falling into a crouch, "the hell-" He took off at a run, full speed, and reared back with his right hand. *Kacchan always starts with a big right swing.* "*UP!"*

Ochako was hurting all over, and tired, and low on energy, but she wasn't done yet. She still had enough for this part.

"*You shut the hell up!"* she screamed back, reaching into her pocket as she burst into a sprint, withdrawing some few precious pebbles she'd stored away and rearing back with her arm. Even in his anger, Bakugou's eyes widened again for a brief moment when she moved, not knowing what she was doing, and he broke out of his rage-induced lunge just enough that her momentum could overpower his.

A loud, long scream exited her throat as she threw herself into him full force. She'd ducked under his arm, wrapping her arms around him, and in that brief moment where he'd broken and come at her without his defenses, gotten the opportunity to put him into a choke hold Aizawa had shown her.

In another life, she may not have been strong enough to hold him, but in this one, the anger rushing through her veins refused to let her let go.

"*Holy smokes!"* Mic-sensei yelled out over the speaker. "*That's an arm-triangle choke hold she's got him in, folks! The arm she has pressing on his carotid is cutting off his oxygen flow!"*

"What- the- hell-" she heard Bakugou wheezing, his body struggling beneath her. But his good arm was trapped in the air between them; he couldn't bend it far enough to explode her, and she knew he couldn't make another big explosion with his right.

"I'm not- letting you- go forward!" Ochako yelled, pressing her eyes

shut and holding on tighter as he wriggled and started to wheeze, scrambling at her clothes to try and get purchase. He tried to start up an explosion in his palm, but it was too small, and she barely felt it scorch her skin. He resorted to punching her in the ribs, weaker than he usually would have been able to, growing weaker by the second. It hurt, but she held on. "I won't let you hurt him! His *name* is *Izuku*!"

"Uraraka has Bakugou in a submissive hold!" Midnight yelled. "Counting down, from ten-! Nine-! Eight-!"

Hold on. Just hold on.

"Seven-! Six-! Five-!"

Ochako's body was screaming at her. She was near giving out. But she could not, absolutely would not let him fight Izuku here today.

"Four-! Three-! Two-!"

I'll protect him no matter what!

"One! Uraraka wins the match!"

Ochako let go and rolled off him, panting in relief as she curled up on the tiles. A few feet away, Bakugou, who'd started to turn purple, wheezed for air as he grasped at his throat and laid there with a stunned look on his face.

I won. I won. I beat him.

"YEEEEEEEEEEEEEEAAAHHHHH! A VICTORY FOR URARAKA, FOLKS!"

There were tears stinging her eyes as she slowly got up. Midnight was already jogging over to them, looking concerned, but Ochako only had eyes for the face she was searching for in the stands.

She saw him, then- Izuku, staring down at her with wide eyes and looking somewhere in between shocked and scared and proud and impressed, tears starting to leak out of his eyes.

She raised a weak, shaky fist, smiling through her own. Izuku's face twisted, and he rocked out of his seat, freely crying as he put his against his chest.

Izuku...I did it...

It was a good thing Midnight had come over, because she would have eaten it on the concrete if the woman hadn't been there to catch her.

The crowd was eating the match up. The underdog girl had won after all, against the odds, and they were screaming for Ochako as Izuku ran to the stairwell and started making his way down to the area underneath the seating where the medic room was.

She had done that for him. She wanted to win, obviously, wanted to prove herself, but she'd been so determined for him- he just knew it somehow, deep down.

No one had ever done anything like that for him. Ochako had *beaten Kacchan,* for him, to make sure he wouldn't have to face Kacchan here today, something he'd been dreading in his gut and trying to ignore.

He couldn't help but cry all the way there.

By the time he made it to the room Recovery Girl was inhabiting for the length of the matches, Ochako was already lying on one of the cots with a more peaceful look on her face. She jumped when the door flew open, but lit up when she saw him, sitting up even if it made her wince. "Izuku!"

Izuku didn't say a word, just lunged at her and hugged her, clenching his teeth to try and stem his flow of tears. She sniffled, returning the hug with less of her usual strength, and Recovery Girl watched them with a fond sigh.

"Thank you," he whispered, voice broken and uneven. "Th-thank you...so much..."

"It's okay, Izuku," she whispered back. "You're my friend. I'm going to protect you just as much as you protect me."

If that made him cry harder, she just gave him an affectionate pat to the head, and didn't say anything.

"Fuck off!" Izuku didn't know who Bakugou was yelling at, but he hid behind a door as the steaming boy went storming out of the hall. Then he had the misfortune of passing Endeavor in the hall- that man just creeped him out, for some reason- and passed him as quickly as he could. All he wanted was to get to his match in peace, but even Todoroki himself wouldn't let him, as he met him in the tunnel before

they ever got to the arena.

"I noticed something," the other boy said, making Izuku start to sweat under his frozen gaze. "That power of yours. When you use it to hit things, it's an awful lot like All Might's." Endeavor had said that too. Izuku had just snapped out a short *I'm not All Might, and Todoroki isn't you* and left. "Are you his secret love child or something?"

That was, in practical terms, the moment he couldn't take Shouto seriously anymore, speaking in terms of their entire relationship.

"I...uh...what?"

"Are you related somehow? Is that why he gives you special attention?"

"I- uh- I- that's ridiculous," Izuku stammered out, wondering if Todoroki was actually brooding most of the time or if he was actually just having thoughts like these. "And besides, what's up with...*your* father, and his weird thing about you surpassing All Might?"

Shouto's face darkened, and he proceeded to tell him a story that he apparently wasn't too disturbed by but Izuku found sickening. That was when he decided he was going to get Endeavor arrested.

Todoroki was pretty much stone-faced all the way up to their match after that. When it started, however, he narrowed his eyes and let out a gigantic blast of ice, and Izuku punched it into smithereens.

The boy's eyes widened for a moment. Izuku wasn't sure if he was taken off-guard, or thinking further about his insane All Might love child theory.

Either way, he propelled himself forward and started a dangerous battle of striking ice spears that left sharp icicles all over the arena floor. Sometimes he used Float or Black Whip to dodge, darting around the edges of the ring like a ping-pong ball, until there was ice on all sides.

He has to use his fire, he thought, eyeing the frost creeping up Shouto's body. *He has to realize it's okay.*

*But with **him** watching...*

He was determined to help Shouto now, just like Ochako had helped

him. Izuku wasn't leaving anyone behind.

He threw himself into a spin and glided along the edge of an ice wall. He hadn't just been bouncing around at random. He had made his movements precise and deliberate, purposefully baiting Shouto into icing certain areas, and they were practically encased by now. The ice stretched too high for any of the cameras to get a good view.

"You aren't going to beat me this way," he yelled down from a perch on a spear of ice, electricity crackling around his body and helping keep his temperature up. Shouto turned to squint up at him. "You have to use your fire. It's *yours*, Todoroki! Not his! It's your power! Don't you get it?" He raised both hands, letting Black Whip surround them until he'd formed a bludgeon, and leapt down too fast for the ice to follow him. "You can do so many great things with it that he'll never even dream of!"

Shouto's eyes widened. Izuku was coming in fast, already too close to hit with a large attack, and his improvised weapon was closing in. Shouto had started to tire, as well, and Izuku could see it.

"Use it!" he yelled, catching Shouto in the shoulder and sending him flying. "Use it for what you want to do! Not what he wants! What do you want, Todoroki?"

He stood there and watched as Shouto took a hard landing and let out a gasp, shivering once as he crawled his way to his feet, nearly slipping on the amount of ice coating the floor. He looked back up at Izuku with wide eyes and an almost haunted expression. Neither of them were moving, and he found himself speaking. "I...I want...I want to be a hero."

Izuku raised his arm. Looking as though he wasn't even fully aware he was doing it, Shouto let his left side spark. His flames were beautiful, thawing the frostbite covering the rest of his body until it was nothing but steam rising.

"It's your Quirk," he said, becoming mildly solemn, because he still did want to win, and he had lined Shouto up like this for a reason. "So give it everything you've got."

He pushed off and went for a punch, feinting when Shouto tried to hit him with his flames, and went into a full body tackle.

With the power he was using, they burst out of the ice enclosure in a loud explosion that set the audience to screaming, Shouto wincing

against the wind as he went sailing to the ground with Izuku on top of him. They collided and he bounced, once, long enough for Black Whip to fly free and wind out to contort around his body. It twisted and pulled, suffocating his fire as Izuku himself rolled in midair, unintentionally moving exactly like Aizawa did when he went in for a capture from above, pulling the main tendril of Black Whip taught as he slammed Shouto down again with a hand to his head.

"YEAH! And Midoriya busts out of the ice with a finishing capture move! Say, that looks pretty familiar, Eraserhead~!"

Shouto stared up at him in wonder, the fight in him gone, but he didn't look so angry anymore. He looked like himself, for the first time since Izuku had known him.

The festival went fairly quickly after that. The extremely explosive matches were out of the way; Tenya sped Shiozaki out of the ring rather non-violently and Tokoyami easily maneuvered Mina out. Izuku wasn't sure if Ochako was feeling up to the challenge of fighting Kirishima, but even though it appeared he had the upper hand due to his Hardening, he knew her Quirk was better suited for the match. He was forced to fight her hand to hand, after all, as he had no ranged attacks, and all she needed was one touch to send him out of bounds.

It was actually rather funny, the way it went down, as she merely smiled and held a defensive stance, waiting for him to charge as he stood there grimacing, smart enough to know what was going on. Finally, he did, and the audience winced as Ochako didn't even try to dodge, letting his punch collide with her gut and startling him badly enough he never saw the slap to his face coming. Then, she floated him out of the ring, while he squawked and flailed, even if she had to do it hunched over, seeing as he'd made her vomit up some saliva.

She had actually hit her limit there, however, as she declined her match with Tokoyami after a few hits and he gave her a respectful nod as she left the ring. Izuku got into a speed fight with Tenya, as they both bounced around the ring trying to shove the other out, but he ultimately had the advantage, being able to float, and sent the other boy out of bounds with a gust of wind.

Then he fought Tokoyami, and proceeded to spend the entirety of the match at one end of the ring fighting Dark Shadow with Black Whip, because he figured he may as well show he could do long-range combat too. It ended up lasting quite a while, and even the audience

started to get bored, so he activated Full Cowling and set Tokoyami out of bounds with a strong kick.

Everyone started to cheer at that point, and he almost forgot why.

The fact that there *was* no one left to fight hit him like a ton of bricks. The matches were over- everyone was through.

And he'd *won*.

He found himself smiling, reuniting with Tokoyami and Ochako, who'd come in third due to the order of the matches, under the stadium, and Midnight directed them onto their pedestals. Nervousness was broiling in his gut as they stood there, waiting to rise up to the arena, able to hear the chanting of the audience, but Ochako smiled at him, abating some of the anxiety. Something about it seemed to say they were going to be just fine.

They both still let out simultaneous squeaks when the stage started to rise. Tokoyami let out a noise of amusement, folding his arms, and the sun shone down on them as they rose up, every single face in the stands seeming to look completely new now that he was looking at them from the winner's circle.

"Look at this, folks! How rare! Almost a whole team from the second exercise made it to the podium! It looks like these listeners chose wisely for their alliance!"

And then All Might put the first place medal around his neck, and said he was proud of him and that he'd done an excellent job showing the world that he was here.

If Izuku almost started crying again when All Might hugged him on live television, neither of his two friends said a word, thankfully.

(Midnight was doing something on her phone while the cameras were focused on All Might for his short little speech, though, and it made him cringe a bit. Somehow, he just knew it involved him somehow.)

in this biosphere

Chapter Notes

a record for comments on last chapter! thank you guys so much!! :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The Sports Festival had been held on a Friday. Yuuei had let out classes for that Saturday, to give them a day to rest, but honestly, it wasn't all that much more tiring than his usual training routine, so Izuku woke up with an extra half hour of sleep and tumbled out of bed for breakfast.

His mom had squealed so loudly he worried for his eardrums when he got home the day before. She'd hung his first place medal in a picture frame in the living room, alongside the pictures she'd taken at his birth, first, third, sixth, ninth, and twelfth birthday parties (which were usually just them, after Bakugou started disliking him), his first day wearing his UA uniform, and his first costume reveal. He thought it was a little much to have out where everyone could see, but then again, they never got visitors, and he didn't want to make her feel bad.

"Have fun!" she called out as he left the apartment, money for a train ride in his hand.

A buzz from his phone alerted him to a text from Ochako. *Just left my house!*

Me too, he wrote back. *See you in twenty!*

Momo texted their group mere seconds later. *I shall arrive presently!*

"Please, I assure you it's all right," she was saying, about half an hour after. "Honestly, my parents have more money than they know what to do with. Please let me treat you!"

"Weeeell..." Ochako twiddled her index fingers together, chewing on her lip. Her eyes were lingering on a plant near the food court of the mall they were in, and she clearly wanted to give in, but she'd denied it already a few times because of her conscience. Izuku knew her parents didn't exactly have a lot of money, however- neither did his mother- so the offer was temping. "I guess it's okay, just for today. Just don't get too much, okay?"

Momo lit up with a smile. The credit card in her fingers as they checked out looked like one of those golden ones with no limits. Izuku also got the feeling she got a little bit of glee out of shopping for them, as she started getting more and more vocal about what she thought looked good when they tried things on, even though they hadn't even come to shop for clothes; oh, well, he would be satisfied with being her dress-up doll for the day if it made her happy.

He really didn't get *too* excited about anything, however, until they were strolling past a comics store and he saw something in the window that made him jerk to a stop and gasp. "What is it?" Ochako asked him, curious, doubling back and snorting when she saw what was in the window.

"It's patterned on All Might's Bronze Age!" he exclaimed, pointing at the hoodie inside. "Usually clothes are based on his Silver Age or Golden Age, because the designs are more popular, or even his Young Age, but-"

"I'll get it!" Momo nearly yelled, too excited to even be embarrassed at her volume, before literally *running* into the shop to get it before he could ask how much it was. She came back out about two minutes later with an eager smile, holding the hoodie in her hands. "Here."

Izuku beamed. He should have said something like *You shouldn't have done that!* but his All Might enthusiasm was too overpowering. The other two helped him slip it on over his T-shirt- also All Might-themed- and he pulled the hood up to cover his hair. "Thanks, Momo."

"It's my pleasure!"

"You know, seeing all of All Might's costumes makes me think you should change yours up a little," Ochako said as they walked outside, making Izuku raise an eyebrow at her. "You know, have a little color variety! Add some white and black!"

"Maybe. I've been thinking about adding a cape."

"Really? It wouldn't get in the way when you're jumping?"

"Well, it wouldn't be too long, but I was thinking it would make a great emergency wrap, plus if someone was caught in a fire I could use it to avoid smoke-"

"I think a cape would look excellent," Momo interrupted, clasping her hands together. "Midnight-sensei has been helping me redesign mine,

you should also-!"

Their conversation continued down a few rabbit trails as they walked. The sidewalk was relatively peaceful and empty, and Ochako eventually took his hand, swinging it back and forth while she smiled. She prompted Momo to take his other hand, which made him turn a little pink, which made them both snicker at him.

They'd rounded the corner onto a street that Momo knew a nice ramen restaurant was on when Ochako paused with a gasp. "Hey, look! See that guy? Capes are totally cool!"

Izuku followed where she was pointing. A tall, broad young man was walking down the street with a woman with blue skin, dressed in a hero costume with a red cape and a visor. For some reason, he seemed extremely familiar.

"Oh, I think he might be from Yuuei," he said, the resemblance clicking. "Third year?"

"Oh, that's so cool! Someday we'll be doing work studies, too, can you imagine?"

It was only because Izuku was looking at the pair that he noticed the woman looking up at them and smiling as she spotted them walking hand-in-hand through the crosswalk. A moment later, however, her face fell, and the hair on the back of his neck stood up. He twisted his head around.

A plain-looking grey car was speeding down the street towards them. It clearly had no intent of stopping, even with three teenagers in the way, and he barely had a moment to react. "Car! Move!"

He leapt into a tackle, pulling them along with him, and then the fire hydrant near them exploded.

Ochako screamed out of surprise. In the few precious seconds it took for them to hit the asphalt and try to scramble away, the car skidded through the crosswalk, brakes squealing as it turned, and he saw the shine of a gun peeking out of the passenger side. It was the reason that water was now cascading into the air and drenching both him and Momo, and seeping onto the ground under Ochako's hands.

Ochako, who was closest to the car, and the first in its line of targets.

"Ochako!"

He jumped, using Full Cowling to boost himself, but bullets traveled fast. He meant to grab Ochako and throw her away, but it hit him before he could fully grab her, and his mind instantly went white.

He'd felt pain before. He had broken his arm and leg, his fingers, but he'd never gotten *shot* before. It hurt. A lot.

"Izuku! Zuku! Izuku! P-please wake up, Izuku, please- g-god there's so much blood Momo what do I do Momo he's b-*bleeding*-"

"Hey, calm down! He's going to be fine, I promise! What's your name?"

"O-Ochako."

"All right, Ochako, help me put pressure on this. It hit his shoulder, but missed his heart, so he'll be fine, all right? Lemillion, did you get those two in the car?"

"Yes, ma'am! They won't be shooting anyone else anytime soon."

"You there, can you get his phone and call any of his emergency contacts?"

"I-it's all right, I- I can call one with mine."

Izuku hissed when someone pressed into his shoulder. He blearily opened his eyes, finding a vaguely familiar face looking down at him. The woman with blue hair and skin smiled down at him. "Hey, I know this hurts, okay? Just hold still."

He turned his head to the side. Something sticky and wet was coating the ground beneath his cheek. Confused, he tried to look around, but she shushed him. "Come, keep still."

"W-why is he still bleeding?"

The woman above him swore lowly. "Mirio, did you see that bullet hit something else?"

"I think I saw it ricochet."

"Then that means it completely tore through him. Shit...No, don't move him, the ambulance is only a minute out. If we turn him we could cause him to bleed more..."

Izuku faded out again.

"Yooooooo. Are you awake? You awake? You awake? Am I gonna have to keep asking? Hewwo?"

His eyes snapped open. Someone laughed at him, sounding amused, and he squinted. There was a woman sitting across from him, not the one from before, but a woman with dark skin and spiky hair pulled into a bun. "That's a new phrase, right?" she asked. "Uwu?"

"Please stop that," Izuku replied, more out of reflex than anything, a little desperately.

She snickered at him. Realizing he wasn't on the street anymore- no, there was nothing around him, they were sitting in a literal void, what the hell?- he sat up with a jerk and looked around. "I...who are you?" he asked, perturbed.

"Name isn't important," she said with a shrug. "I'm number three." She held up three fingers, doing little for his confusion and smiled at him. "You've been doing pretty well with the other Quirks, so I thought I would give you a little nudge with mine. Have you ever noticed it feels warm when you touch people?"

"Um...yes? I guess?"

"I mean more than it usually would."

"Uh...maybe-"

Izuku jerked as his eyes popped open and his hazy vision came back into focus. There was a man with glasses leaning over him, eyes narrowed, and he, too, looked familiar.

"Call his emergency contact," a voice was saying- maybe the guy's, considering his mouth was moving. "*I'll ride in the ambulance to the hospital with him. Bubble Girl, make sure those villains are squared away-"*

"And anyway, it's called Tactile," the woman kept going, even though Izuku was saying back and forth now and not entirely sure where he was again because everything kept getting jumbled around. "It was my Quirk. You can make others stronger, more attuned with their Quirks, or calm them. It is, in pure form, a supplement Quir..."

"Midoriya Izuku, can you hear me?"

"You activated it subconsciously. You seemed most inclined towards it, considering your personality, so I was betting on you getting it first,

but I guess it's fine you got Nana's...she loves you to death, anyway-"

"Midoriya."

"Are you slipping off again? Geez, kid...okay, fine, just remember- just try to remember you have to touch people to amplify, okay? Man, I hate being a ghost..."

The last thing Izuku saw was the image of several people standing before him in a line. He was falling, feeling like the invisible floor that had been there had just collapsed, and he reached out to the closest figure in his fear, trying to grab onto a gloved hand that reached for him too. It was a woman with black hair, looking concerned, but then everything dissolved, and he never got to talk to her.

He had one last thought before he passed out for real. *I want a cape like hers...*

There was a man sitting beside his bed when he woke up. First, he recognized the boring tile ceiling of a hospital above him; then the steady beep of a heart monitor. It took a minute for his mind to catch up, but he remembered jumping from the car, and then a very intense pain, so he guessed that something must have happened to him. Then he saw the man sitting there, somehow looking formal and rigid even in a sitting down position, frowning at the curtain partition separating them from other beds in the joint room, rhythmically tapping his fingers against his forearm.

Then he remembered-

The heart monitor started to beep rapidly as he jerked up. He gasped, trying to claw off the breaching mask on his face, which made the man whirl around. "Calm down," he ordered, not sounding irritated but still firm. "You're in the hospital. You don't need to exacerbate your injuries."

Nonetheless, he helped get the mask off and Izuku took in a large gulp of air. "O-Ochako n' Momo-mo," he stammered out, vision getting bleary again because of his sudden motion as he tried to look around. "Ochako an-?"

"If you mean your two friends who were with you, they are entirely unharmed and in the waiting room."

Izuku's body visibly sagged with relief. His eyelids drooped with

sudden exhaustion, and he almost pitched over. The man took ahold of his shoulders and tried to guide him back down. It was then Izuku really took notice of him, squinting at his face, and the loopy part of his brain made him smile and start to giggle.

He got a raised eyebrow in return. "Is something funny?"

"You have green hair!" Izuku exclaimed, pointing, which he usually wouldn't have done, since his mother said it was rude. "I never met anyone else with green hair! ...well, except my mom. It's blond too though...like...me squared times Toshi." All Might had told him a hundred times he could say Toshinori when they were 'undercover,' and Izuku had just gone with a respectful Yagi out of habit, but his drugged-up brain wasn't really thinking linearly. It was the same nickname he used for Hitoshi, which he found hilarious, and he started laughing. "Iiiiii met number threeeeeee-"

It was then he realized something, or appeared to, as his smile dropped and his eyes filled with tears. Taken off guard, the man let go of him and frowned. "What's the matter-"

"I'm sorry! I'm so rude! I-I didn't even ask f-for your *name*," Izuku wavered, near crying. "I'm such a bad *guest*...I'm sorry! I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry-"

"It's. *Fine*, young man," the man insisted, placing a heavy hand on his shoulder to get him to stop. "My name is...Sasaki Mirai. Please understand that you are on some pain medication right now, and it's likely making you overreact to things that aren't there. You haven't been rude."

"Izuku!" It was then two teenagers came skidding into their section of the hospital room, still-damp shoes squeaking on the tile, and Ochako nearly collided with the end of the bed with a huff. "Izuku, are you okay?"

"Ochako, are you okay?" Izuku slurred instead of answering, making Momo sigh and put a hand to her face in part relief and part consternation.

Pouting, Ochako jutted her lower lip out and folded her arms. "Am I okay? You're the one who got hurt! Saving me!"

"Oh...well I feel great!"

"I suspect that's because of the painkillers," Momo said with a fond,

amused smile.

Two other faces peered around the curtain. The man- Mirai- gave them a dry look, but they weren't being obtrusive enough to catch Izuku's attention. What *did* catch his attention was, a minute later, another form streaking nearly past them, stopping and skidding on the floor, and then whirling around until Toshinori's eyes landed on him. His expression fell with relief as he panted, clearly having run all the way there, and he rushed over to him. "My boy! Thank goodness you're all right!"

Izuku's demeanor again took a one-eighty as he lit up, ignoring everyone else there in favor of the skeletal man who'd just come (almost) crashing in. He opened his arms and lunged, forcing Toshinori to let him hug him and sit down on the edge of the bed or let him eat it on the floor. He let out a jumbled cry somewhere between All Might and Toshinori and Dad.

When Izuku thought of *Dad*, perhaps not of the word itself but of the feelings that people typically associated with a father, two faces came to mind. Aizawa's presence there was firmly rooted. He had proven, over and over, that Izuku could trust him, that he cared about him, that he would help him with anything. And his sheer admiration for Toshinori had planted a seedling of it a long while ago, cemented by every time the Symbol of Peace took time out of his busy schedule to play with him on the beach and go for ice cream after.

"Thank goodness you're all right," Toshinori sighed, cradling his head and leaning so Izuku wasn't bending forward as far. His hand began to brush through Izuku's hair, over and over, in a way his original father's never had.

Izuku repeated something like *Hi, All Might-inori* that was heavily muffled by Toshinori's suit.

Ochako and Momo looked at them with round eyes from the end of the bed. Ochako had slowly lowered herself down, so she was peeking over the rail, looking uncontrollably curious. She leaned closer to Momo and whispered, even though they could all clearly hear her. "That must be his dad...!"

Toshinori jumped and nearly coughed up blood. "I- er- that is- uh- young-"

A nurse peered around the corner and cleared her throat pointedly. Most of them jumped, almost guiltily, and Mirai merely sighed and

adjusted his glasses. "I'm afraid you're all going to have to wait in the waiting area, as we're only allowing emergency contacts at this time."

"Bubble Girl, Lemillion, let's go," Mirai said at once, standing up with a professional air about him and straightening his suit sleeves. Two sheepish faces met his, and the two- Heroes? Or were they both students?- backed away. Izuku vaguely caught the curiousness on the face of the young man. Ochako and Momo backed up a few steps to follow them.

"Ah- my boy- do you mind if I leave, just for a minute, to talk to Sir Nighteye?" Toshinori asked him, patting his hair one more time and gently setting him down on the pillows. "I just need to confirm what happened...young Yaoyorozu was a bit vague in her panic, understandably..."

"Okay," Izuku said, then proceeded to only let go with one arm and use it to grab onto one of Toshinori's long hanging bangs.

"Y- Izuku, come now, please-"

Several snickers made Toshinori's face heat up as they abandoned him to extricate himself on his own from Izuku, who didn't seem to understand why he couldn't both hang onto Toshinori's hair and let him go into the other room at the same time.

After an awkward, vaguely stilted conversation with Nighteye, concerning the details of the incident, they stood in an even more awkward silence, not meeting each other's eyes, which was interrupted by Aizawa storming in out of nowhere after speaking to his two unharmed students and scaring the crap out of All Might. Toshinori took it as an excuse to clear his throat, adjust his collar, and say he would try and contact Nighteye later before leading Aizawa back. He strategically let the other man walk in first so he would be first victim to Izuku's painkiller-induced affection overload, which was a success, as the boy immediately trapped him in a hug, nearly dragging him onto the bed.

"Am I gonna have a cool scar?"

"Most likely."

"Am I gonna have to miss school on Monday?"

"Probably not, once Recovery Girl gets here."

"Yay! Can I have rainbow bandaids?"

"You're going to need more than a bandaid."

"Do I have stitches?"

"Yes."

"Have you ever had stitches?"

"Yes, I have."

Toshinori made the mistake of letting out a quiet bubble of laughter. Aizawa glared at him. Izuku, who still had an iron grip on his shirt, looked up at him with a grin. "You're my favorite teacher, Aizawa-sensei!"

The man's eyebrow shot up. "Oh? Am I?" He sent a teasing smirk to Toshinori, who snorted and smiled, unoffended.

Izuku's grin became a fraction more loopy. He certainly wasn't so talkative otherwise. "You always listen to me, and keep Kacchan from yelling at me, and you're super cool, and you never even hit me!"

He chirped it out like it was merely a list of positive qualities. Aizawa froze, eyes flickering up to Toshinori, but the other man just frowned in reply to signify he hadn't heard anything about that detail. "Have teachers hit you before?"

"Only like twice," Izuku muttered, having sunk farther into the mattress, obviously falling into sleep. Toshinori's previous light mood had evaporated, and now he only felt a tenseness in his gut that wasn't from running over from Yuuei. Something about the information obviously annoyed Aizawa- more than it did normally- and Toshinori almost opened his mouth to ask. *Is there something else you know?* But he didn't get the chance, as Izuku jerked back up with another blinding smile and crowed out- "Oh! Yeah! And I..." His eyelids drooped, and he yawned. "I have another Quirk!"

The two teachers both froze, and then he fell asleep again, leaving them with that to stew with.

Izuku thought he was doing well, all things considered. He'd gotten shot, and it would have been pretty serious if the hospital didn't have a surgeon with a mild healing Quirk and Recovery Girl hadn't come all

that way to help him. He felt pretty good on Monday, however, even if he still had to wear bandages over his stitches.

He got to class early, as usual. Tenya, Momo, and Ochako all liked to get there about fifteen minutes before homeroom started, so they could all talk. The mood felt downtrodden when he entered, however, and he surveyed Tenya with a frown. "Tenya? Are you all right?"

Tenya's head jerked up. He mustered a smile, getting up to hurry over to him. "Midoriya! I am fine. I just...I just received some...unhappy news on Friday- my brother was...injured. But that's- not important right now. I heard of your heroism this weekend! How are *you* feeling?"

Izuku settled into his usual spot. Momo pulled a new hoodie out of her backpack, offering it to him with a smile, since his other one had gotten ruined via a bullet, and Ochako chattered on about how selfless and cool he had been for several minutes while a few other students streamed in. Tsuyu and Mina both offered him hugs, and Toru sounded like she was almost crying when she gingerly embraced him. Kirishima trotted inside and crowed out that he was *so manly,* saving Ochako, and a congratulations for winning the Sports Festival, which many of the others repeated. Tokoyami settled in the seat behind him while Dark Shadow slithered over and crooned in his ear, worrying over him like a mother hen, and he patted it on the head to try and appease it.

Shouto came in quieter than usual, somehow. His eyes landed on Izuku, and he hesitated, visibly, before slowly walking over to the empty seat beside him. The rest of his friends had left it empty on purpose, after all. "Midoriya," he greeted, sliding into the seat like it might burn him. "I heard you got hurt on Saturday. Are you...all right?"

"I'm fine, and you can call me Izuku!" Izuku returned brightly, smiling.

"Very well." The other boy paused, then slowly averted his eyes. "You can call me Shouto as well, then."

"Thank you!"

A slam from the door alerted them to the fact Aizawa had entered. They all jumped to attention, and Izuku noticed that Bakugou was pointedly ignoring looking in his direction, much quieter than usual. Looking more tired than ever, probably because he'd gotten hit with the full force of a crying, panicked Inko at the hospital two days ago,

Aizawa gave them all a dull stare and inclined his head slightly at the boy standing beside him. Immediately, Izuku perked up in excitement. "This is Shinsou. He'll be filling Mineta's old spot in our class. Don't be rude."

"Hey, awesome man!"

"How manly!"

"Welcome!"

"Are you the guy with the voice Quirk?"

"Oh, how cool! Like Mic-sensei!"

"Oh, that's Midoriya's friend..."

The chattering quieted down when Aizawa glared at them. Looking bored, Hitoshi strolled over to the seat on Izuku's other side, casting Shouto a *I-told-you-so* smirk as he went.

"You can all get acquainted later," Aizawa continued. "For today, as I'm sure you're aware, we have some things to discuss. Many of you received internship offers due to your performance at the Sports Festival. On your desks you'll find a list of Pros who requested you, and if you didn't receive any, a list of agencies willing to take on any students who need an internship. These internships will take place for the entirety of next week, and will involve working with Pros out in the field in real situations. So, in preparation for that, you'll need updated costumes and a name to go by. I'm no good at that, so Midnight will handle this part of the lesson."

Izuku had to cough to muffle a laugh as Aizawa zipped himself into his sleeping bag and left his colleague to do all the work.

"This is kind of sudden," Hitoshi muttered, staring his miniature whiteboard and leaning into one palm. "Hey, you're gonna be a Hero student. By the way, come up with your Hero name and costume right now."

"Aww, don't worry, Shinsou!" Ochako tried to encourage him, twisting around in her chair to give him an encouraging look. "We can help! Maybe something to do with your Quirk?"

"I really don't want to overtly advertise the fact that I can brainwash

people."

"What about you, Shouto?" Izuku asked, turning to look at the boy.

"I don't know. I'll probably just use my name."

"Todoroki! You can't just use your *name*," Momo huffed, sounding a bit exasperated. "That's too obvious!"

Izuku turned to look at his own whiteboard. He did have an idea, but he wasn't sure if it was stupid or not. Plus Aizawa-sensei had been eyeing him from his sleeping corner when he thought Izuku wouldn't notice, so he was a bit nervous as to whether something had happened or not.

"What's yours, Izuku?"

He yelped when Ochako swiped his board. "Hey!"

She glanced at it and beamed. "Oh, this is perfect! The Support Hero: Versatile! You *can* do a lot with your Quirk, can't you?"

Izuku's face flushed. He looked away, rubbing the back of his head. "Yeah...I even found another way I can use it this weekend, too. I can...transfer the energy I use into someone else, to amplify their Quirk."

"That's even more perfect! Todoroki, how about something like the Element Hero or Freezerburn or Frostbite?"

Shouto shrugged. "Frostfire?" Izuku suggested. He shrugged again, and wrote it down on his board. He tried to lean over as subtly as he could to read it, though he got the feeling Shouto noticed anyway. *The Elemental Hero: Frostfire.*

"Well, Midnight-sensei said they weren't permanent, anyway," Ochako continued. Izuku eyed Tenya, who hadn't said much, simply staring at his board for most of the time, and frowned.

Out of the corner of his eye, he caught Hitoshi scribbling on his board. Curious, he raised an eyebrow and leaned over. The other boy immediately covered it with his hand and gave him a dry look, causing him to pout. "Come on, I want to see!"

Sighing, mostly for show, Hitoshi moved his hand. "Persona: Mindjack Hero. I like it! But I thought you said you didn't want to allude to your

Quirk?" Hitoshi shrugged, not answering. "Did Mic-sensei suggest it?"

Hitoshi's ears turned pink. Izuku snickered to himself, making them go even redder, and ducked before Hitoshi could swat him with his board.

Izuku also noticed Aizawa looking at *Hitoshi* sideways every once in a while. His brain gears were turning, but they weren't coming up with much, and he found himself wondering at what was on their sensei's mind.

And Tenya's.

But there wasn't much he could do sitting in class.

He decided to flip over the page- well, pages- showing his internship offers and nearly screamed.

5,457 offers?!

Well...at least he had...options.

Chapter End Notes

switched tumblrs to @silver-jackdaw~

Perfectly Still

Izuku could hardly contain his excitement. He had been overwhelmed by just how many heroes were interested in him, but at the top of the list was a name he hadn't been expecting to see- *Hawks*. As in number three, flying, impeccable record Hawks. Someone who could help him with his flying, not to mention land him in the public eye (not that he particularly wanted to be in the public eye, but he knew it was a good thing for getting opportunities.)

"Guys," he whispered, twisting around in his seat to look at his friends behind him. The teachers had let them gather in groups again, and his usual circle was huddled around their usual area of the room, where they hogged access to the class bulletin board and whiteboard. Tsu had drawn a couple of frogs on the whiteboard, while Ochako kept decorating the bulletin with various pink and yellow stickers. "I think I know who I want to intern with."

"Already?" Ochako asked, curious.

"Yeah! *Hawks* sent me an offer! The number third hero!"

Tokoyami looked up in surprise. "You received an offer from Hawks, Midori? I did as well. Perhaps we can intern together?"

"Yeah! That would be great!"

Shouto paused, visibly. His eyes wandered from Izuku to his own stack of papers, and he hesitated for a moment before speaking. "I...also received an offer from Hawks. I was thinking of interning with...well...but perhaps he would be... a better choice."

A better choice translated to *a choice with friends*, but he wouldn't admit that out loud.

"Go with Hawks, maybe we can all work together!" Izuku encouraged, excited. He didn't want Shouto spending more time around Endeavor than necessary, especially since his plans to get the man arrested weren't in place yet. Honestly, what kind of person put his own children through such hellish training just for his own vendetta? "What about you, Ocha?"

"Oh! Well..." Ochako glanced down at her paper and chewed her lip. She had gotten way more offers than she expected, but she had taken

one of her pink highlighters and highlighted all the ones that were combat-oriented. "I was thinking about...you know Miruko?"

"The Rabbit Hero and number six?! Of course I do! She sent you an offer?"

"Y-yeah...she's really, um, intimidating, you know? And I really want to get better at fighting, so..."

"That's a great idea, Ochako!" Momo chimed in, smiling. Both Ochako and Izuku gave her a curious glance, silently asking who she was interning with. "Well, ah...I was actually thinking of interning with Midnight-sensei. I- I know it's a bit unconventional, interning with a teacher, but, well..." She trailed off, embarrassed.

Izuku knew what she meant. Midnight had been giving her extra help to redesign her costume, because though their Quirks weren't similar, the limitations were. Both relied on how much skin they were showing to work. Midnight had sent the formula for her costume material to Power Loader and Mei to help get Momo a costume that was easier to move around in and covered a bit more, for Momo's comfort; with the easily-tearable material, she could still access more skin to create large things, without having to run around whilst being freezing all the time when they trained in exercises with Shouto.

"That's a good idea. I think she'd have a lot to teach you. Plus she's well-versed in hand to hand combat, too, since her Quirk isn't inherently offensive."

A more relaxed smile overtook Momo's face. "That is what I was thinking. In addition, I believe she patrols in the same area of city as Death Arms, so..." She trailed off for a second time, eyes drifting over to where Kyouka sat talking with Toru, Shoji and Koda.

A snicker left Izuku's mouth. Ochako bit down on a smile, making Momo's face heat up, and she stammered for an excuse. "Um, well, that is-"

"You just want to be near Jirou, don't you, Momo?" Ochako asked through a giggle, making Momo's blush worsen.

"O-of course not, I just..."

"Momo and Kyou, sittin' in a tree, k-i-s-s-i-n-" Ochako began to sang, yelping when Momo slapped a hand over her mouth with a lackluster glare. She grinned sheepishly.

She opened her mouth again when Momo lowered her hand. "It's fine, Momo, really! I mean, to have a crush, you know? I mean, I kind of hope I see Tsu some time next week..." She twiddled her thumbs, gaze settling on Tsuyu, who sat beside Koda, and a distracted smile appeared on her face.

Izuku decided to take pity on them and change the subject. He looked over at Tenya, who sat further away than usual staring at the clock. "Um, Tenya, what about you?"

The other boy jumped like he'd been shocked. "Oh, I'm sorry, Midoriya. I was...probably going to go with Manual. I think he'd be excellent to learn from." Even while he replied, his eyes looked a bit distant, and Izuku had to stop himself from gnawing on his lip in worry. He usually fell back on saying 'Midoriya' when he was distracted or nervous, too.

He looked over at Hitoshi, who had his head leaning on his arms as he slumped onto his desk. "Toshi? What about you?"

The boy shrugged. "I didn't get any, since I was Gen Ed at the time, but I think I'll go with Present Mic, since he takes students who don't get scouted."

Izuku's smile turned into something more like a smirk. "Aww, really? That's sweet. You must really like him, huh?" He had to admit, he took great pleasure in embarrassing his friend and watching his face turn red. Hitoshi averted his eyes, glaring at the doorway.

"He's just cool. That's all. And he has a voice Quirk and can help me with my speaker."

It definitely had nothing to do with the fact that he always got excited when he got his English papers back, or preened like a peacock when Yamada praised him, or the time Mic-sensei had ruffled his hair, Izuku thought. Honestly, Hitoshi was starting to be just as transparent with Present Mic as he was with Eraserhead. He seemed to look up to them like they were the only fatherly figures he'd ever had.

...well, he'd actually never said anything about his parents, so maybe that was accurate.

"Well, I'm sure it'll all go well. Shouto, I can add you to our group chat so we can all talk!"

"Uraraka, Midoriya, please stay after class. I have some notes on your homework."

Ochako had been vaguely confused when their sensei asked them to stay. Izuku looked just as perturbed as she did, because she was pretty sure Aizawa-sensei hadn't graded the homework from Friday yet (she loved him, but after the Sports Festival on one day and a student getting shot on the next she doubted he had done much grading), which meant he had something else to say. He motioned for Izuku to wait outside, which meant he wanted to talk to her first, which made a seed of anxiety blossom in her gut. Was this about the shooting?

"You can relax, Uraraka," he said when he saw how nervous she was, leaning against the podium with his hands in his pockets. "You aren't in trouble. I just had a question."

A tiny bit of the tension in her shoulders relaxed. She adjusted the straps of her backpack and stopped herself chewing on her lip. "What is it, sensei?"

"I've noticed you've seemed irritated with Bakugou today." Just like that, the tension was back, and she felt her face flood with heat. "Want to tell me why?"

And, well...she really couldn't deny it. She'd glared at him when she came in, and made sure to seat herself between him and Izuku even if they were on separate sides of the room anyway, and glared at him when he went up to pick a Hero name, and generally acted like she didn't like him. Because she didn't.

"You defeated him in the sparring matches. Did something he said upset you?"

"No," she bit out, trying not to sound rude but some of her irritation slipping out anyway. "It wasn't what he said to *me*. It's what he says to *Izuku!* He's a bully, sensei! Or at least he used to be! Haven't you *noticed*?" She looked up at him imploringly, but looking him in the eyes seemed to drain some of her courage, and she looked away again, embarrassed. "He only ever yells at him and Izuku always gets nervous around him. I mean, you had to keep him from hitting him on our first day! And on the obstacle course, he kept screaming at him and everything and- Izuku always flinches when he shouts and Bakugou calls him that insulting nickname and- it's just so *obvious*! They aren't childhood friends, Izuku is scared of him and Bakugou doesn't even like him!"

She knew she sounded upset. Still, she was surprised when a hand landed on her shoulder and made her look up to find her teacher kneeling in front of her, a concerned frown on his face. "I have noticed that their dynamic isn't one that involves friendship," he said, measured and careful, "And I was planning on asking him about it. I'm sorry if you thought I was ignoring it." Ochako deflated, looking back at the floor and trying not to let her lip tremble like it always did when she got too upset. "Has Midoriya talked to you about it?"

"N-no, but...but he knew I beat Bakugou for him at the Festival, because I just couldn't stand to see him fight him, and he came to thank me after, and he cried a lot...and I always try and hold his hand or stand between them when Bakugou yells, and he thanked me..."

"I see. I'm sorry if you felt like you couldn't bring this up to me. I'm going to talk to them both," Aizawa assured her, and something deep down felt relieved because he actually sounded like he *cared*. "I'm going to make sure Bakugou makes some changes to his behavior, and Midoriya doesn't have to deal with him. Try and do me a favor and try not to hold onto being angry. I know you have good reason, but it won't work out in the long run. You should be able to get along with your classmates, and enjoy your time here without worrying about someone else."

Ochako bit into her lip. "Yes, sensei," she muttered, quiet. "Do you want me to send Izuku in now?"

"Yes." She flinched out of surprise when his hand landed lightly on her head, giving it a pat. "One last thing. I'm proud of you. You deserved that win. Don't ever doubt that."

Despite her sour mood, she found herself smiling. Something light and happy had replaced the dour feeling in her chest, and she looked up to beam at him. "Yes, sensei! Thank you!"

Izuku didn't really know what to expect. Ochako had come out of the classroom looking happy enough, but she'd also looked a little regretful when she smiled at him before heading out. Aizawa-sensei was standing at the front of class, pose casual, when he walked in, but he did look more tired than usual. He nodded for Izuku to sit down.

Anxiously, he slid into a seat at the front. He couldn't remember who had been sitting there during class. Toru, maybe?

His teacher's voice broke him out of his string of worried thoughts.

"Midoriya. Is your wound healing all right?"

"It's fine, sensei," he replied, eyes flitting around the room. "Am I in trouble?"

Aizawa sighed. He sounded exhausted, but then again, he always did, to a degree. "No. I need to discuss something with you. While you were sedated at the hospital, you told me something that was cause for some concern." Confused, Izuku stared at him, and his stomach dropped at his next words. "You told me previous teachers had hit you."

Oh, no. Why had he gone and done that? How had he messed up? Izuku had just wanted to leave his earlier years at school behind, not dredge them up. "D-did I? Well, I, um, must've been mistaken, you know how loopy hospital meds can make you-" he said with a nervous laugh, stopping when Aizawa gave him a dry look.

"I can tell when you're trying to lie, Midoriya. I promise you that you can talk to me about this. I told you I would believe you, didn't I?"

Izuku looked away from his unflinching stare. "I- I know that, sensei," he whispered, fiddling with the charm bracelet around his wrist that Ochako had bought for him. It was from a build-it-yourself kit, one of a few she'd given to him, Momo, and Tsu, with the same base design but special charms for each of them and a pink star on all of them. "I know that you'll *believe* me, I just...I just don't want to...bring up things in the past."

There was a rustle of cloth as Aizawa knelt in front of the desk. He reached out and placed a hand on Izuku's wrist, with hardly any pressure, light enough he could pull away if he wanted. "I know that. But if someone at your old school mistreated you, then they could mistreat someone else." A pang of guilt coursed through him that he tried to ignore. "But, more than that, you *deserve* justice. Whatever happened to you- it wasn't right. I've been thinking about this longer than since Saturday, Midoriya." Startled, Izuku glanced up at him, and his stomach flipped at the way his teacher's eyes had gone narrow. "I've noticed your behavior. How hard it is for you to trust. You don't deserve to feel that way. You were- and are still- a child; you deserve safety and security. I can't force you to tell me anything, but I also can't not be concerned about this. Not just as your teacher, but as a Pro that's supposed to uphold the law."

Izuku examined a particularly interesting piece of paint chipping on

the far wall. Hesitantly, he let a tiny bit of his guard down. *Aizawa-sensei.* ★★★★★. *Will believe me.* "I...I just wanted...to forget it all."

"I know. I don't want to make you relive it, but if there's something I can do, I need to do it. And...I know that Bakugou had something to do with all this."

Izuku looked up at him in a panic. "You can't expel him!" he blurted out, which made a furrow appear in Aizawa's brow, because it confirmed something worse than he was even suspecting was going on. "I-I mean, you can't...I just...I don't want-"

"Midoriya, calm down. I won't expel him, all right?" Depending on just what he'd done, that is. Aizawa knew his other student had- to put it mildly- behavioral issues, but he had been hoping it would- and to some extent, had seen it- mellow out as the semester progressed. He still had obvious anger issues, but he'd started to be friendlier with a few students, Kirishima specifically. But he still had extreme reactions to Midoriya, and that was a problem. "What did he do?"

Midoriya ducked his head, something like shame in the way he held himself; it again gave Aizawa a bad feeling. "He...he bullied me," the boy finally mumbled out, sounding like he regretted making the confession as he did it. "For a...long time. The last day of junior high, he...said to jump off the roof, so I might be reborn with a Quirk to be a Hero...But he's different now! I mean, he still hates me, but-" He looked up, pressing his lips together, and his eyes strayed to the door again. "But he likes Kirishima, and some of the others, and he isn't entirely the same, he- I want him to...to be able to get better, and I don't want to ruin his dreams."

Shouta's first instinct was to feel a blinding white-hot flash of anger. Considering it all, things made sense now. Bakugou, with his ego, thinking Midoriya was Quirkless, hated him when he found out he got into Yuuei, hated that he surpassed him in progress, hated that he was suddenly achieving things Bakugou was not. However, even if his knee-jerk reaction was protective- with good reason- they were both his students now, and he had a duty to both, so he had to retain some element of calm and neutrality to deal with the situation properly. Bakugou needed to face consequences, that was certain, but Aizawa didn't think he was too far gone, not yet. He could still rein the boy in and make a Hero out of him, a proper one.

"And...it wasn't...entirely his fault. I-I mean, he was...he was a kid too, you know? Th-the teachers, they just, let him do whatever he wanted,

for years, and never chastised him, or punished him. There were no...rules, or consequences, or...anything. P-please, sensei, don't expel him."

Aizawa sighed. He put a hand on the boy's head, ruffling his hair. "I won't, kid. But you have to understand that I need to investigate this, and Bakugou *will* have to change his behavior if he wants to stay in this course, let alone my classroom. It's one thing to let him stay, but after that, you have no influence. It's all up to him and the choices he makes. If he can't work with others, he has no future here." Izuku bit his lip, somehow still feeling guilty, and Aizawa hated it. He really had gotten the class with issues this year, hadn't he? "Do you think you can tell me about this with the guidance counselor?"

"...yeah, I...think so."

Aizawa ruffled his hair again. He stood up, offering his hand on reflex, and might have felt briefly embarrassed if Midoriya didn't take it so quickly, obviously glad just to have something to hold onto.

They walked to the counseling services office, and after years of silence, Izuku finally talked about so many of the things that had given him nightmares since he was a child. He might have cried some, and had to take a break in the middle of it, and still felt guilty, but part of him felt *good*, finally felt relieved, finally felt relaxed.

Because people believed him, and told him it wasn't his fault, and finally, he got to mourn the loss of his first friend instead of bottling it up inside.

Aizawa-sensei. ★★★★★. Will believe me. Will help me.

Hitoshi hadn't really been expecting anything *bad* to happen when he went home. It was just another day, wasn't it? His current foster family wasn't that bad- they didn't really pay attention to him, or do normal parent things, but they didn't bother him, either. Sure, they never asked how his day went, or welcomed him home, or congratulated him on a good grade, or...much else, but they left him to his own devices, so that was fine. He did try and keep out of their way, because both his foster father and mother got annoyed very easily, and he knew how easy it was to step on the wrong toe and incite someone's temper. Isoko- his 'father'- worked at a legal firm, doing all the tedious, time-consuming work no one else wanted, and Aomi- his 'mother'- spent all day in a restaurant taking orders, so they were both exhausted and typically irritated when they got home.

Nothing too majorly bad had happened in the two years he'd been there, mostly because he knew how to keep his mouth shut and stick to his own devices, so he figured he could stick it out until he turned eighteen.

Then he got home, and began unloading groceries from Aomi's car when she called over to him to help, sounding tired and annoyed, and accidentally dropped the bag holding the eggs. "Goddammit," she groaned, reaching out as she veered close and smacking him over the head, the sharp part of her ring scraping into his cheek just a bit. "Be fucking careful! God, now I have to go buy more eggs...more fucking milk, probably, too, and... Fuck, can you go and at least wipe yourself off? Use your brain for once, kid!"

Feeling a bit numb, Hitoshi reached up and wiped at his face. It wasn't a lot of blood, but he only succeeded in smearing it across his cheekbone, making her scowl deepen. He always did *something,* didn't he? Every home, he messed it up or things like this happened or both. Yet he couldn't help but sigh, too used to it to really care, ducking his head as he turned to go inside.

"Excuse me. Mrs. Yamane?"

It was a familiar tone, one he'd heard before, and he froze. He looked up, only moving his eyes, and his heart sunk when he saw a woman standing there; she wasn't familiar, but her posture, her demeanor, her stale smile was. "Yes," Aomi bit out, frowning. "What?"

"My name is Ms. Tsukuda. I work with child welfare." Aomi tensed as the woman smiled blandly at her, a phone in her hand. "I was here for a visit with young Shinsou here."

"But- we haven't had a visit in over a year," Aomi stammered, clearly taken off guard. Hitoshi kind of wanted to ram his head into a wall. It was just one time, just one slip up, just one...

"I'll make note of that. I'd like to start with a talk with Hitoshi here. On our own."

And that was how he ended up sitting in the school's counseling office, slumped against the wall across from Izuku, because apparently Tsukuda was just as unimpressed with his bare room and mildly underweight BMI as she was with seeing his foster slap him, and instead of going to an orphanage facility, he was now at school, because two teachers and the principal had filed a complaint for

concern and gotten a social worker with a license for Underground work to check on him. And now he was a ward of the school, which was better than not getting to go to school, but he still wanted to sink into the floor and go to sleep for a while.

His eyes flicked up to where Izuku sat. "So," he began in a drawl, trying not to think of his current, humiliating circumstances, "what're you in for?"

Izuku gave him a teary smile. He'd obviously been crying at some point. He gave a half-hearted shrug. "Things my old school did."

"Bullying and Bakugou and shit?"

"Yeah."

"Color me surprised."

"Are you okay?"

"I dunno."

There was a bright pink bandaid on his face Tsukuda had given him. He didn't know what he was going to do.

The door swung open. At first, Hitoshi didn't recognize who was standing there, and he felt his brow furrow in confusion, but when the man opened his mouth it became obvious. "Hello there, little listeners! Feeling a little down today, are we?"

"Mic-sensei?" Izuku asked, surprised. "Is that you?"

The man let out an amused laugh. "Of course it's me! Is it the hair? Let me tell ya, it takes sooo long to style it that way every morning." He stepped inside and leaned down, ruffling both their mops of hair. "I'll be right back! Gotta talk to the boring adults for a minute," he said with a wink, then jogged through the waiting room to Hound Dog's office. The door had a glass window in it, and they both could see Aizawa standing there, with his *I'm not in the mood today* grim scowl on. Tsukuda, Nedzu, one of the other counselors, Recovery Girl, and a civilian representative from Hitoshi's former orphanage had all streamed in over the course of the hour, leaving them to wonder at what was going on. Hitoshi just shrugged when Izuku glanced at him.

He watched Present Mic step inside, pull the door shut behind him, and walk over to Eraserhead, planting a quick kiss on the man's cheek

before he turned to where he knew the desk was to address Nedzu. He'd accidentally let slip one day, in class, when a girl kept prodding him, that he liked boys instead of girls, and he'd frozen up, not sure of what to do, and Mic had interrupted them with a laugh and something to say about the short story they were reading and a wink to Hitoshi. He'd gotten the feeling Mic-sensei was like him, too, but he wasn't sure, but he supposed he could be now.

It would be nice to live with them...

Stupid thoughts. Things never went his way, and he supposed he would just rotate around to different chaperones until another mildly crappy foster was found.

The door opened again, startling him. It was a woman who was clearly Izuku's mother, this time; she zipped over to her son and wrapped her arms around him with a concerned look on her face, practically cooing. "Oh, Izuku, are you okay? When Aizawa-sensei called me and told me, I just- oh, I'm so sorry- oh, I'm sorry, is this your friend?"

"Yeah, this is Hitoshi."

"Nice to meet you," the woman greeted him, warmly, as she took his hand and shook it gently. Hitoshi flushed a little, nodding in reply, and she turned to look at the door. "I'll be right back, Izuku. We'll get this sorted out, all right?"

Izuku nodded wordlessly. Then his mother entered the office, and they were left sitting there in awkward silence again, and Hitoshi sighed. As usual, he guessed.

what the eyes say

Izuku left Yuuei after his mother signed a whole lot of forms in the counselor's office without really telling him what they were for. She just gave him a disarming smile and told him she was taking care of things, and that she was sorry it had taken so long, but he didn't have to worry about anything. He didn't particularly want to press her on it, partly because he didn't really want to know, partly because he didn't want to make her think about it longer than necessary either, so he was satisfied with going home to make cookies.

He was a little worried about Hitoshi, but he saw the boy perk up- despite his efforts not to- when Mic-sensei walked over to him and knelt down with a hand on his shoulder, and he was pretty sure he'd gone home with him and Aizawa-sensei, so he figured Hitoshi would be fine.

He pulled up the group chat with his friends as soon as he got home, which Ochako had named after a news article she'd found funny about the Sports Festival. *Team Tokoyami- or Team Midoriya, as some have been calling the winning trio, considering the leadership shown by Midoriya Izuku- showed quite the impressive performance at the Sports Festival this weekend.* But Tenya still hadn't said anything; his silence was unusual.

[midosquad]

uravity: welcome to the chat shouto!! i'm ochako!

creati: I am Yaoyorozu, but you can call me Momo or Yaomomo. :)

tsukuyomi: this is Tokoyami. you can all start calling me Fumikage if you wish.

Todoroki Shouto: did you all change your names to your hero names?

uravity: haha we got a little excited this morning. you don't have to tho!

Todoroki Shouto changed his nickname to [frostfire]

froppy: welcome to the chat todoroki :)

frostfire: you can call me shouto. i don't really prefer my last name.

persona: i just got to aizawa-sensei's house did you guys know he and mic-sensei are married??????

creati: wait why are you at aizawa-sensei's home?

persona: long story

uravity: wait omg they're married???

frostfire: this does remind me. Midoriya, Shinsou, neither of you happen to be related to Aizawa-sensei, do you?

persona: oh my god you are a conspiracy theorist

Izuku flipped the app shut at that point. He would message them later, but right now, he was still worried about Tenya, and why he'd been acting so off. Had his brother been injured worse than he'd let on? What if he'd...died?

It only took a short search to get his answer.

[2 am crush posting]

Izuku: have either of you guys talked to tenya??

Ochako: I haven't since class ended. why?

Izuku: Search Ingenium online, his brother got hurt and i'm really worried about him

Momo: This is concerning. I wondered why he seemed so subdued in class. I will try and talk to him tomorrow.

Ochako: we should try to cheer him up! maybe we can bring his brother a basket or something too, when they let visitors in :(

Izuku: yeah, that's a good idea...i'm just worried

Ochako: don't worry! we'll be there for him! he'd do the same for us!

It was in the middle of the night, when Izuku was trying to get to sleep, that something clicked into place. All of a sudden, he remembered where Tenya said he wanted to intern, and his brain made a tenuous connection as it kept him awake.

Hosu...Hosu...what's so important about Hosu-

Manual was stationed in Hosu.

And Hosu was where they thought the Hero Killer was.

He stayed up, for a long time, with a bad feeling in his gut, hoping that Tenya didn't have it in his mind to try and track down the person who had hurt his brother, but Izuku's intuition told him it wasn't just random chance. Tenya had gotten a fair amount of internship offers, what were the chances he randomly selected one in Hosu?

Tenya valued justice, and rules, and good behavior, but he also looked up to his brother and loved him more than anything. Izuku didn't know what he would have done if something similar happened to his mother. He could only guess that he would have been raring to get out and find whoever had hurt her. His worries left him with light bags under his eyes from lack of sleep the next morning, and, tired and concerned, he went to school and told Aizawa-sensei.

"Unfortunately, I can't force Iida not to intern with a certain Pro just based on your hunch," his teacher told him, not unkindly. He was frowning, clearly concerned about it, just like Izuku, but he knew he was right. "I'll try and talk to him, and advise him against doing anything, but I'm not allowed to dictate internships."

"I understand, sensei," Izuku murmured quietly, going to sit down by Hitoshi, who looked marginally more energized than the day before. He hadn't gotten around to messaging the group chat back, but he'd seen a bit of him and Shouto bickering about whether he was a conspiracy theorist or not.

"Are you all right, Midoriya?" Shouto asked him, frowning, immediately taking notice of his tired countenance. Izuku mustered a lackluster smile for him.

"I'm fine, Shouto, and I said you can call me Izuku if you want! That's so formal..."

Class began, and Tenya didn't look at any of them.

The police still hadn't gotten anything out of the criminals who'd tried to run him and his friends over before shooting at them. Izuku couldn't fathom why they'd gone after a couple of nobody high-schoolers- they had no practical value, and he didn't exactly have a

bunch of mortal enemies running around, unless one counted the League of Villains, but the League would have done their dirty work themselves and didn't really have a reason to single them out like that. Their goal was misaligned: they'd been after All Might, to prove a point, not specific students.

His thoughts were interrupted by a hand landing on his shoulder. It turned him around, firm but not quite jerky, and he got a good look at Tenya's scowling face before the boy unloaded on him. "Did you tell Aizawa-sensei I was planning on interning with Manual in Hosu to look for the Hero Killer?"

Izuku's brain blanked out. Vaguely, he noted Ochako and Momo giving them worried glances in the hall. "U-um-"

"That is not your place, Midoriya! Whether I choose to go to Hosu or not- that is my decision! So what if I want to see justice served, and watch out for a villain that hurt my brother? You have no idea what it's like! He's in the hospital, struggling to live, and I have to sit here and watch- you could not understand what that *feels* like."

"I...I didn't mean- I wasn't trying to-"

"I don't care. Stay out of it, Midoriya," Tenya told him, a glare falling upon his face before he turned and stormed away. Izuku was left standing there, floundering for something, anything, to say, and he felt the sting of tears in his eyes before Ochako's arms folded around him.

"It's okay," she warbled, squeezing him tight. "He's just...he's just under a lot of stress right now, and he's worried, and I'm sure he didn't mean to yell at you, I promise." Looking sympathetic, Momo laid a hand on his arm.

All Izuku could do was watch Tenya's form fade in the hall, and feel guilt eat away at him.

Because, to some extent, Tenya was right. He *didn't* know what that was like. He had never been forced to sit by and watch someone he loved suffer like that.

...He just didn't want it to happen to Tenya, too.

Bakugou didn't know why he'd been called in as lunch started, on a Tuesday, to the counseling office, to an empty room where Aizawa sat

behind a desk looking grim. He frowned with a quirked eyebrow when he stepped inside, shoving the door shut behind him, and huffed as he sat down in the single chair opposite the desk obviously set aside for him. "What'd you call me here for?"

Aizawa leveled him with a heavy stare. He didn't look very happy to be there either. "We need to discuss your behavior."

Bakugou wrinkled his nose. Huh? What behavior? "What the fuck are you-"

"Language. I am referring to your behavior regarding Midoriya, both in middle school and your time at Yuuei. I have been looking into Aldera Junior High, and some rather enlightening information has come to light."

That...was unexpected. Aldera?

"What?"

Aizawa's eyes narrowed. Despite his bravado, the man's expression still made Bakugou feel a little bit like sinking into a puddle on the floor. "I know about your behavior in your previous schools. I know about the bullying, mistreatment of other students, primarily Midoriya. I know you used your Quirk on him, destroyed his property, gave him minor injuries, and generally terrorized him. I also know you told him to jump off the roof on your last day there together." Bakugou sat there frozen, eyes wide, completely taken off guard. His urge to stand up and yell, to demand *what the fuck was going on, did Deku do this? Was this his fault?* was stamped out by Aizawa's stare growing even stonier. "You need to understand how serious this is. Midoriya's mother is filing a lawsuit against Aldera for reckless endangerment and neglect, and Yuuei is helping with the investigation of that school. Before you ever set foot into our halls, you had already committed more than enough acts that we would usually bar you entry for, and that has *nothing* to do with Midoriya. That is entirely your own fault, because these are your actions, not his. *He* is the one who asked me not to expel you, and to give you another chance, which I am only deciding to do because I think you have potential."

Bakugou's stomach was churning. He had never expected that anyone would find out about- about everything, that they would tell him that was all *his* fault and not *Deku's*. He didn't even think about it most days. And yet-

"How- how did you-"

"That's irrelevant. You are not going to be expelled, in part because there was never any technical record of your transgressions, but know that we *are* aware of them and that makes me fully aware of potential issues that could arise with you becoming a Hero with the attitude you have. You will get a second chance, but if you throw it away, I will not give you another. You will not yell at Midoriya, or any of your other classmates, or threaten them. You will not use the name Deku. You will not harm another student, at any point. You will not be allowed to interact with Midoriya in training classes, work with him on teams, or be on opposing teams, and you will not harass him. If I see you break my rules at any point, it will be an automatic detention, and I'll suspend you after three. If you earn another one after that, I will expel you. Do you understand?"

Numbly, Bakugou nodded. He didn't know what he could say. Deku- *Midoriya-* he was messing even this up for him, because that was what he always did, because-

Aizawa sighed.

He leaned forward, folded his hands on the desk, and stared at him until Bakugou looked up and met his eyes.

"I realize you probably believe that I'm offering favoritism to Midoriya. While I may be fond of him as a student, I am not. Favoritism would be expelling you on the spot without giving you a chance at all. What I personally want to do doesn't matter. For, probably the first time in your life, I am going to treat you like every other student. *Fairly*. I've already talked to your parents about this, and I realize that you didn't get a great chance to grow humility as a child. Your teachers and peers gave you favoritism, they praised everything you did, and the school treated you like you were inherently better than others because of your Quirk. Your mother freely admitted that she knew you'd built up an ego because of this and her own anger issues didn't help things. You're not blameless, but this is not all entirely your fault, Bakugou. You are not beyond hope. You can still change for the better and become a great Hero. But you need to realize these things you learned are false. You are not inherently better- your classmates all have strengths and the drive to succeed, as you saw for yourself in the Sports Festival. None of them are worthless and none of them are weak. I strongly suspect that what you so angrily accuse other people of are the things you're afraid of being yourself."

Heat flooded the student's face. He turned away, staring at the floor,

unable to argue because of the great sense of embarrassment creeping up his spine. Because of the knowledge that Aizawa had already gone to his parents, because of the reminder of his loss at the Festival, because of how accurate Aizawa was.

"Bakugou. I'm willing to work with you and help you become a Hero this school can be proud of. Part of that will be attending therapy after class, twice a week, starting this week. It will only depend on whether you're willing to work for it too. Are you?"

There was nothing else he could do. Aizawa was not like any other teacher Bakugou had ever had. If nothing else, he had to have some grudging respect for the fact that he couldn't yell his way out of this. Aizawa didn't take *any* bullshit.

"...okay," he finally muttered out, voice gravelly.

Tenya didn't talk to him for the rest of the week, but Izuku tried to focus on other things- mainly, his upcoming internship.

He was happy to have Shouto following after him after all as they walked down the hallway of Hawks' agency. The less time spent with his father, the better. Izuku was still trying to figure out the best approach to convincing the boy to go to Aizawa about that whole mess. He didn't want to scare Shouto off, or pressure him too much.

Though that wasn't much of a concern, really, since Shouto had started to plaster himself to Izuku like paint on a wall, somehow growing an instant attachment after their fight. He looked to Izuku for social cues, how to react to other students in their conversations; he wasn't entirely helpless, but he'd obviously not socialized much, and while Izuku hadn't before high school either, he was more cemented in the friend group Shouto was entering.

"I'm sure Hawks will be up shortly, he ran into some trouble downtown," the sidekick who'd let them up said with a friendly smile, leaving them in a stale-looking office with a few sofas to lounge on while they waited. Izuku looked around, noting how bare it was, how clean of Hawks' presence- most Heroes had at least a little bit of decoration in their offices.

A loud smack startled all three of them. They turned and stared at the window, where a man easily recognizable by his bright red wings was now standing on the balcony, rubbing his head. He quickly opened the window with an indentation made in it to act as a handle, dropping

into the room with a sheepish smile. "Man, thought that was open..."

"Hawks?" Fumikage asked, sounding a little hesitant.

The man grinned at them. "That's me! I'm guessing you're my interns from Yuuei? Ah, I wasn't expecting to get so many... Sorry about that. I usually don't...run into windows."

Izuku bit his lip to contain a snicker. Hawks crossed the room and sat down on the couch across from them, looking friendly. "Why don't you guys introduce yourselves? Hero names, then yours!"

"Tsukuyomi. Tokoyami Fumikage."

"Frostfire. Todoroki Shouto."

"Versatile. Midoriya Izuku."

"And I'm Hawks," Hawks continued cheerfully, waving his hand. "Just Hawks." That was odd, too. "So, why'd you all choose this internship?"

"You can fly, and I need practice with aerial combat," Izuku said, turning his head to survey more of the room. Something was just...*nagging* him.

He vaguely heard Fumikage pick up where he left off. "You seemed a good choice. I thought it would be useful to intern with a classmate."

"Midoriya chose this one, so I did too."

"Ah, you can't choose all things because your friends do, Todoroki-kun."

"It is useful to be with friends when learning important things. He is also my first friend, so I feel I can learn things from him as well as you."

"Well, that is true- I made a friend last month too! Well, now that pleasantries are out of the way..."

Izuku lost track of Hawks' voice as he spoke. Something about him seemed...fake, almost. Not in a malicious way- he did genuinely seem to be an easygoing guy. But he talked like he had a mask on, even if the mask wasn't entirely different from his true self. It felt familiar; like an act of self-preservation. It was very...

"You're kind of strange."

The room came to a screeching halt. Looking surprised, Hawks looked over to him. "...uh? How do you figure?"

His smile was gone. It wasn't entirely fake, but it wasn't *entirely* real, either.

"The building is very impersonal and typical, and it doesn't seem like you spend a lot of time here. Most Heroes at least have a small trace of themselves at their offices. That seems to clash with the personality you project, as someone easygoing and relaxed, and friendly, but your sidekicks and staff talk about you distantly, like you aren't around much, and don't speak with them as often as other Heroes do with their staff. And your personality doesn't seem completely fake, but I can tell that you're putting up a front and acting that way on purpose. It's also very clear from your track record that you're very intelligent, but you seem like you try to downplay that. Controlling your persona so much isn't something you would usually learn in a school like Yuuei. How to deal with the media, deal with the law, to control ourselves in public, but not that. You're also pretty young, but you rose the ranks very quickly after debuting, and when I researched it last week, I found out you don't technically own this building; you don't have a name, and you talk about making friends like Shouto does, like you haven't had very many, which all makes me think someone put you here on purpose. So...you're strange."

Izuku realized how rude he was being and abruptly shut his mouth, feeling embarrassed. Hawks' expression, on the other hand, had become downright comical, as he seemed trapped in his own thoughts.

Oh my god did I get a mini Nedzu? I got a mini Nedzu didn't I? Fuck he might murder me in my sleep I swear to god if he laughs and sounds like Nedzu-

A bead of sweat slid down Hawks' face. He tried to sound casual. "Uh...wow. That's...a lot. You really just...figured all that up, huh?"

Izuku frowned at him. *Does he look nervous?* "Do you come from somewhere like Shouto?"

"What?"

"Oh. Right." Shouto looked away from Midoriya, finally, with a completely blank face. "My father is a terrible person. It's all right if your father was a terrible person too."

That was how Hawks got trapped in his own office for over an hour, forced to listen to a high-schooler blandly recount his tragic backstory as casually as one would retell the weather forecast, tearing down any of Hawks' expectations about one of the only heroes he'd looked up to, and the terrible Nedzu clone forced him into barking out a summary of his own childhood with those terrible piercing green eyes that made him feel like a piece of shit for being anything less than completely forthcoming, and then he had to sit there as the brats *felt bad for him* and completely steamrolled over him trying to say that at least the Commission had given him a chance to make a difference because they now didn't believe a single thing he said because his "thinking was compromised ever since he was a poor little kid." Which was more intimidating because now he was starting to think it was true. And now the Todoroki was looking at him like he needed to be adopted, which he wasn't sure whether to feel embarrassed or insulted about.

And he was forced to take them all on patrol together, since the green one looked at him with a bone-chilling smile and mentioned how *Unfortunate it would be if my friends wasted their internships~* after Hawks mentioned he'd mainly wanted to talk to them about the League of Villains, and he commented on how his methodical spy tendencies also made him suspicious, and if Hawks was a little terrified of a fifteen-year-old who could somehow read him like a book despite all of his training from the HPSC to avoid just that, he wasn't admitting it to anyone.

At least green bean seemed to like him. Hawks would sooner shoot himself than have a miniature Nedzu trying to end his hero career. *As he was apparently going to do to Endeavor,* and the worst thing was, Hawks fully believed he could do it, even with the little evidence he had. It was a gut feeling.

Jungle (Gym) Cats

They didn't patrol during the second day of their internship. Instead, they headed to a training ground Hawks apparently used for flying practice, as he'd seemed to have the exact same idea that Izuku had about Fumikage using Dark Shadow to fly and he himself needed some practice using Float greatly. Shouto stayed on the ground, making ice slides to catch them when they fell, practicing on getting the angles right so he could safely return people to the ground from falling buildings or such. To be honest, it started to turn into more of a game, and Izuku even got Fumikage to laugh, as they started to see who could knock the other out of the sky. Izuku's problem was focus- getting used to Float, and making sure he knew how to make complicated movements while using more than one Quirk; Fumikage was more stable, being that Dark Shadow was also sentient and could protect him, but he wasn't as fast.

"Watch out for your left, Tokoyami!" Hawks called out from where he was hovering in the air above them, watching Izuku dart around. Fumikage turned and barely guarded against Izuku, who came flying out of nowhere, which made the hero above laugh. "Gotta be faster!"

Dark Shadow suddenly slithered out from underneath the collar of Fumikage's cloak and tried to nip him in the face. Izuku yelped and flailed backwards, accidentally losing his balance, and went tumbling towards the ground for about the thirtieth time. Not one to be one-upped so easily, he lashed out with Black Whip and wrapped a tendril around Fumikage's ankle, giving him a good yank that sent him sailing as well.

Shouto threw up a large wall of ice to catch Fumikage, who was coming right towards him. The ground crept up on Izuku faster than he thought it would, and he barely managed to look behind him- which was down- before Hawks zipped down and caught him with a grunt. A few tiny red feathers went flying as he came to an inelegant stop on the ground. "You're heavier than you look, kiddo."

Izuku wasn't sure if that was a compliment or not. "Thank you?"

He climbed off the Pro and stood far enough away he wouldn't get smacked in the face with a wing as he started to ascend again. Before he could get too far off the ground, he jerked back with a yelp to avoid a relatively slow-moving icicle aimed for his head. "Hey!"

"I think we should try to knock Hawks down instead," Shouto said, the face of innocence, which, for him, meant his face was just eerily blank. "He is the fastest hero, isn't he?"

"Hey, that's totally unfair-"

"That's a great idea!" Izuku exclaimed, floating into the air again. "Aim for his joints!"

"I'm being bullied by my interns!"

"Dark Shadow! Attack!"

They spent lunch and dinner that day in Keigo's office, leeching off his large amount of money for takeout, and managed to bully their way into his actual apartment the next day after training since it was closer than the office. He sat at his kitchen table pouting while they tore into food from a barbecue joint down the street.

"My dietitian is going to be pissed I got this three times in a row."

"So what?" Izuku asked, barely swallowing a piece of chicken in time to speak. "You can do what you want, can't you?"

Keigo paused. He was an adult, wasn't he? Even if the HPSC dictated what he ate via a dietitian, who kept his fridge stocked with approved meals, who'd put up a list of approved restaurants to order from on the door, who had a key to come in and inspect his food when he wasn't there. But he was twenty-two now, an adult, not a ward of HPSC, who could order his own takeout.

"Yeah," he said, like it was a sudden realization. "I'm an adult!"

"Uh...yeah, you are."

Feeling suddenly excited- it wasn't like he never cheated, but he for some reason hadn't thought that he could just start getting what he wanted whenever he wanted and tell his dietitian to fuck off- he reached for the stack of takeout menus the three had sorted through and rooted through until he found one from a bakery. "I'm ordering a cake."

"Ooh, get a triple layer one!"

Fumikage looked up at him from a piece of salmon. "I highly suggest the triple layer fudge cake."

"I like chocolate," Shouto said, which cemented Keigo's choice, and they proceeded to down an entire cake in the span of one evening. It gave him a colossal stomachache, but at least it was something he'd done to himself.

Keigo was muttering something about Nedzu when he realized Shouto was standing about three inches away from him and yelped. "Do I have to put bells on all of you?"

"What do you mean by Midoriya being a miniature Nedzu?" Shouto asked, instead of answering, staring at him with a furrowed brow. Keigo never really *used* his desk other than to sit at the computer and answer an email or two, but he'd been in the chair for about ten minutes, making a nonsensical diagram with cartoonish drawings of Nedzu's face.

"Seriously? Have you ever spoken to your principal?"

"Not really."

"Then trust me when I say they're eerily similar."

He let the kid stand in the corner and listen to his video call with Nedzu, who called him just to subtly make fun of him via asking how he was doing, since he was such a *young* hero and had gotten three little hellions as interns, and they'd been on the news after bickering in midair for over ten minutes while Shouto hung awkwardly from Hawks' grasp. The newscaster had wondered in all seriousness what *villainy* they could have been discussing; meanwhile, no one could decide where they wanted takeout from that day. Nedzu analyzed him like the evil genius he was, able to guess exactly how it had been going, and as soon as he ended the call, Izuku came into the office with a tray of tea that he'd brewed.

Shouto, with one hand to his chin, waited until Izuku was at the other end of the office before leaning over to murmur to him. "Do you think it's possible for a human and an animal to be related?"

"That's exactly what I'm saying!"

Shouto was crouched down, feeding a cat who hung out in the local park from the palm of his hand, when a gust of wind blew something into his field of vision. A figure stepped out of the alley beside him, uttering a low *"Fuck-"*, and Shouto's eyes made out the familiar outline

of a white pharmacy bag. Natsuo, who Shouto was fairly certain was in college for something medical-related, had mentioned in passing how hard it was to get medicine refilled after losing it, so he turned his heel and cast a long, thin wall of ice that wouldn't bother anything on the sidewalk. An icicle carefully skewered the bag near the top, stopping its progress in the wind.

He walked up to the bag and plucked it off the ice. Then he turned to the man who had emerged from the alley; he wore a dark hoodie with the hood pulled up, a mask over his face, and dark sunglasses. He was probably sick or something, Shouto guessed. "Here."

Completely frozen, the man stared at him as he stood there with his hand outstretched for what felt like almost a minute. Confused, Shouto held the bag further out, and almost robot-like, the man reached out and took it with his own gloved hand, still saying nothing. "Are you all right?"

"...I'm fine."

The voice seemed...familiar, somehow. Frowning, Shouto let his hand fall to his side, and squinted. "Sorry, but have we met somewhere before?"

He got another weird stare in return. "Nope," the guy replied, yet he wasn't moving. Didn't people usually leave pretty quickly if they didn't want to have a conversation? "You're Endeavor's brat, aren't you?"

An immediate frown fell on his face. "I would prefer to be known as myself, not Endeavor's child, but yes."

The man snorted. "Oh? You don't like him?"

"No."

An awkward silence befell them. Something about his response threw the man off, but he wasn't sure what. Was it how fast he answered?

"Really? Well, you're becoming a hero like him, aren't you?"

Shouto's frown deepened. "I want to be a hero for my mother, not my father," he corrected, perhaps more sharply than he'd intended, which gave the other pause again. He got the sense he was being analyzed, evaluated somehow, like when Izuku stared at other people and did it to them, and he didn't quite like it.

"Oh, what about your father don't you like?"

Shouto pressed his lips together. "One shouldn't gossip with strangers," he said, to avoid answering the question, then looked down when something brushed against his ankle. It was the cat, probably unhappy at having her lunch interrupted. He bent down again and held out the can of food he'd been feeding her. She settled back into a crouch, starting to gobble up the soft food immediately.

For some reason, the guy bent down beside him, staring at the cat as it ate. This sure was a weird conversation.

"Let me guess. You're interning with Hawks, aren't you?"

It was a pretty easy guess. Hawks was the main hero agency in town. "Yes."

"Bet you got a lot of offers after the Sports Festival. What'd you choose him for?"

Shouto shrugged. There was no harm in talking to a curious civilian, he thought, so long as he didn't say anything that would sound bad for Hawks if it got spread around. "My friend was interning here."

"Think I heard something on the news about ya. '*Frostfire*?'"

"My friend suggested it."

"You real attached to friends?"

Shouto thought for a moment. He didn't really know the purpose of that question...didn't most people get attached to their friends? He shrugged. "He is my first friend."

"Oh?" At that, the man's voice became a little more...annoyed, maybe? "Don't have very many?"

"Not really."

It felt like the guy was poking and prodding for something that Shouto didn't know. He looked up and opened his mouth to ask a question, but before he could speak, he heard the sound of brakes squealing coming from behind. Then, before he could act, the man seized him by the shirt and lunged out of the way of an oncoming car.

Shouto collided with the pavement hard enough to draw a cough from him. Even still, out of reflex, he twisted his foot and sent an ice wall

shooting up at an angle, enough to lessen the impact for the car so the driver hopefully wouldn't be injured as badly and protect the store it would have barreled into.

He looked up and froze. The man's glasses had fallen off; under black tufts of hair, Shouto could see piercing blue eyes that were strangely...familiar.

Then he remembered the cat. Sitting up and looking around in a brief panic, he spotted it in the man's other arm, meowing angrily against his jacket.

"Dumbass was texting," the guy drawled, then let the cat down so it could dart down the alley he himself had come out of. Then he stood up, brushing his hands off. "I have a cold, so forgive me if I head out instead of sticking around to give a statement or whatever. You're a Hero in training, aren't you? I'm sure you can handle it."

Shouto just sat there as he walked away, not really caring if a random stranger did what he wanted. Then he stood to check on the driver, whose only injury was a cut on his forehead from where it had slammed into the steering wheel, and looked for his phone to page Hawks.

Hawks was rather annoyed when the beat cop on scene mentioned to Shouto that he shouldn't use his Quirk in public without permission. "My interns have permission to use any defensive or safe-guarding measures they need to," he said, trying not to let his voice deviate too much from his usual laid-back drawl. Even just being around the little brats made it hard to...well, be a fake person all the time, he guessed. "Sure would've been messier for you to clean up if the car went through the windows, wouldn't it?"

The officer looked away from his seemingly friendly smile. After the car was carefully loaded onto a trailer and taken away, Shouto melted the ice, being careful not to shatter the glass in the process, and the store owner rushed out to thank him and give him a free strawberry popsicle. Seeing the boy look at it like it was an alien was hilarious, he had to admit.

His hackles rose when a fancy-looking car pulled up to the sidewalk. It was about four o'clock, now, and they'd been bullshitting about having work to do since Monday so Shouto wouldn't have to go home, but he figured someone would come calling at some point. A man in a suit stepped out of the passenger side.

"Good afternoon," he said, with insincere politeness. Bitterness settled on Keigo's tongue. "I'm here to take young Todoroki home for the day."

Shouto frowned. "Ah, sorry," Keigo said with a fake smile, waving one hand. "You know that case I called over about? We're about to crack it *wiiiide* open, I just can't spare him."

"Endeavor would prefer-"

"Sorry, but unless they changed the rules since last year, isn't it pretty common for interns to spend the whole week at their agency since they can go anywhere in Japan?" Keigo interrupted, a barely-concealed threat in his tone. "I guess I can call the school if you insist, get them to re-evaluate their guidelines...and here Shouto was getting such great hands-on experience, with all the work he's been doing...be real inconvenient to get interrupted right in the middle of it, but..."

The man's lips settled into a dissatisfied line. He probably didn't personally care, but would just get chewed out when he returned empty-handed. "Very well. We will drive over if he calls."

Keigo waved amicably as the man got back into the car and it pulled away. Beside him, Shouto took another bite of his popsicle and started to chew on it, making him shudder. It was almost as creepy as when he'd walked up to the freezer in Keigo's apartment and gotten a handful of ice to eat. "Your poor teeth."

"It's not that cold."

Keigo patted him on the shoulder. "Let's get back to the apartment. You want takeout?"

"Yes. Can we get soba?"

"Sure thing."

He knew what it was like having his every move watched and decided for him. If he could give the kid at least a week's worth of a break, he would.

Movement in the corner of his eye caught his attention. He turned, but it was just someone in a hoodie turning out of an alley nearby, walking away with a plastic bag looped over their wrist.

There he was, getting all paranoid just because he'd started to branch

out a little and make his own big boy decisions. Sighing, Keigo leaned down to pick his intern up so they could fly.

For some reason, the weird guy was at the park the next day when Shouto arrived on the heels of Izuku. His friend bent down and set the cat that kept following them around free. "Here you are, Tsu-chan!" he exclaimed, with a happy smile; he'd named it after their classmate, apparently. "Shouto, is something the matter?"

"Huh? Oh, no," he said, turning away from staring at where the man in a hoodie was leaning against a tree seemingly doing nothing. "I just saw someone I met on the street yesterday. I thought it was a weird coincidence I saw him again."

Izuku tilted his head. "Well, I suppose he might live around here."

"I guess so."

Izuku looked up when a shadow fell over them and smiled. "Hey, Fumi!" he called up to the sky, waving as Fumikage slowly descended to stand beside them on the grass. Whether it was wise or stupid, Keigo let them patrol by themselves as long as they stayed near each other and kept one of his feathers on their persons. For the past two days, they'd been meeting up at the park just before lunch.

"What a mad banquet of darkness," Fumikage said as he landed, obviously happy with the progress he'd made with learning to fly. It was a cloudy day, too, which put Dark Shadow into a good mood. "What do you two want to eat today?"

"I want fast food," Shouto said immediately, bending down to pet Tsu. "My father never lets me have that."

"McDonald's, then?"

Shouto lit up like a little kid on Christmas. He shifted so he was sitting on the ground, Tsu purring in his lap. "He says their food is made of sludge and salt. Let's get that."

Izuku snickered. "Do you just want to try every food your father never lets you have this week?"

"Yes," Shouto replied, the beginnings of a smile on his face, but it fell a moment later as he thought about it. "But let's choose one that isn't very busy. I don't want anyone...taking pictures of me." Izuku frowned

at him, and he shrugged. "I don't want him to see it and get mad."

Izuku's frown deepened. "Would he hurt you just because he saw you eating out?" Fumikage asked, sounding aghast.

Shouto shrugged, uncomfortable. "...He hits me for less important things."

"...you know, I've been meaning to talk to you about that," Izuku said, gently, as he knelt down in front of him. Talking in public wasn't ideal, but the park was quiet that day, and he couldn't see anyone around. "Do you think you could talk to Aizawa-sensei about this, Shou?"

The boy froze. His arms had curled around Tsu, like she was a comfort pillow, and he slowly stroked her ear. "I...don't need to tell Aizawa-sensei about it, Midoriya."

"If your father hurts you, you should tell someone," Fumikage pointed out, voice soft.

"It...really isn't that bad."

"And what about the burn on your arm?" Shouto paused again, taken off guard, and Izuku grabbed his right arm, pulling it closer and rolling up the sleeve. The burn on Shouto's wrist was scabbed over, slowly healing. "I noticed it when we came on Monday. Training shouldn't leave you with scars."

"...it's not-"

"My friend," Fumikage interrupted, "you do not deserve this. I know that it's...difficult." He eased down to kneel beside Izuku, sympathy in his voice. "My mother did not have a mutation Quirk like I did. She treated me very badly before she had enough and abandoned me at a facility for adoption. But I was able to find parents who were like me, and treated me with care and respect. You deserve the same."

Izuku pressed his fingertips to the burn. Another Quirk had slipped out that week, when Tsu had jumped on him in an alley with a broken leg and he'd panicked and had barely even registered what had happened when her leg fixed itself in his arms and he walked away with a cramp in his shin. He hadn't told anyone about it, yet, since he still wasn't sure if he had hallucinated or not, but now his gut was telling him it was real, and he could use it. Slowly, the burn disappeared, leaving unmarked skin in its wake, as his fingertips

glowed with a soft light. Shouto stared at them like they'd just grown mouths and told him they were going to eat him. Izuku resisted the urge to shake his arm out to get rid of the pain.

"I...don't want to upset Fuyumi," he finally uttered, looking downcast.

That was the crux of it, wasn't it? It was always about someone else. "My father hurt me when I was three," Izuku told him, very quietly. "I didn't want to tell my mother and upset her. But when she found out, she made him leave. Your sister cares more about you than an illusion of a family."

"Your sister is an adult, and can take care of herself," Fumikage added. "Please, tell Aizawa-sensei. We can be there with you."

Shouto slowly pulled his arm away and stared down at the cat sitting on his legs. After a minute, he muttered something out, but it was too quiet to hear. "What?" Izuku prodded.

"...It's not...fair. My sister told me that my oldest brother died in a training accident. My father treated him like he does me. It's...not fair that he...had to die...while I would-"

"Shouto," Izuku said, feeling a great sense of despondency settle over him, and placed his hands on the other boy's shoulders. "That wasn't your fault. You aren't doing something wrong by getting out. I'm sorry that your brother couldn't, but if we could ask him, I'm sure he'd want you to leave, too."

"I concur. Hitoshi, his foster parents were also abusing him, but Aizawa-sensei helped him leave. Please, my friend, let us help you."

"...all right. I'll...talk to Aizawa-sensei."

Relieved, Izuku smiled. "Great," he said, rocking back on his heels and letting Tsu jump away from them to go roll around in the grass. "We'll go with you on Monday! But first, let's go get McDonald's."

Shouto smiled. It was a small smile, but it was still there, and Izuku took his hand to pull him up and walk down the street with him. Fumikage followed them, trading banter with Dark Shadow about what they wanted to eat, and the clouds rolled by overhead, like any other day.

Behind a tree, and behind his mask, Dabi stood in the shadows with gritted teeth, never hating himself more than in that moment.

Bare Your Claws

"I need to talk to our information broker."

Shigaraki stared at him with the blankest expression Dabi had ever seen. "Why?"

Grinding his teeth, Dabi tried to ignore the stares of the other League members who were, for some reason, just lounging around the front room of the bar. He tapped his fingers on the wood beneath his palm. "Does it matter?"

For the whole minute Shigaraki stared at him, the only sound that could be heard was Kurogiri pouring Compress a drink. "Yeah, kind of does."

Dabi heaved out a sigh. "I need...help. With something."

Shigaraki's eyebrow shot up. Everyone was staring even harder at him, now, if there was such a thing. He knew why: he was the asshole who made laziness a job title and never came around for anything, whether it was help or conversation. Dabi was a loner, kept to himself, never asked for anything. He'd never needed anything, until now.

"What?"

Dabi's eyebrow twitched. Clearly, however, Shigaraki wasn't going to budge unless he spat it out, so he gritted his teeth. "I need...to get custody of my little brother." Toga's mouth popped open, aghast, and he spoke before she could suggest what she was probably going to. "The legal way, unfortunately."

It was like he'd grown three heads and vomited up a goddamned nuclear bomb. Why couldn't they just be normal villains, who didn't give a shit about what anyone else did, who kept to themselves instead of sitting around waiting for gossip?

"...huh. Okay." Shigaraki continued to stare at him, making Dabi sigh, before setting down his whatever-it-was-called little handheld game system that he carried around constantly. "Weird."

Dabi scowled. "How is this weird."

"Well, it's weird you have any living family," Toga chimed in, grinning when he glared at her. "But why do *you* need to take care of him?"

"Because our father is a human shitstain," Dabi bit out, the drumming of his fingers increasing in speed. "Can you just give me the guy's number already?"

"Come on, Dabi! Tell us the story! You never talk about yourself!"

"Gee, I wonder why? Shigaraki-"

"No wait, I want to know too. Why all of a sudden you have a little brother who needs your help?"

Compress winced at the audible sound of Dabi grinding his teeth. "Perhaps it's a personal matter?" he suggested, only to get several blank looks in return. Well, that didn't work. He greatly suspected that the younger members of the League didn't know what personal meant, unfortunately. He cast Dabi a vaguely apologetic shrug.

Dabi reached up and covered his eyes with one hand, groaning. "Fine. Our father is fucking Endeavor. You happy?"

Toga let out a loud, over-exaggerated gasp. Spinner dropped the TV remote he was holding, while Magne folded a hand over her mouth and hummed like she was watching that stupid drama she liked on television. Shigaraki's eyes became wide and just a bit maniacal, as Dabi had predicted, which was why he didn't want to bring this up.

"Your father is fucking *Endeavor*?" he cried, sounding mildly hysterical. "Dabi, what the fuck?"

"Wait, does that mean your brother is that little hero brat going to Yuuei?"

"Were you a hero too?"

"What did Endeavor do?"

"Your brother is *Todoroki Shouto*?"

"Everyone, please," Compress said, holding up his hands to silence the torrent of questions as Dabi's eyebrow started to twitch dangerously again. "I mean, who is really that surprised? Many villains are related to Heroes, after all, seeing their corruption up close is a good reason to turn against them." Under the bar, he took a five-dollar-bill from Kurogiri. "And they both have fire Quirks, in hindsight."

"What did he *do?"* Toga whispered out, like she was about to get the

scoop of the century, and it made everyone start staring at him again. He groaned.

"Fine."

So he told them, with all the gory details, how he'd almost kicked the bucket when he was a kid, how he got his scars, how his mother was trapped in a mental institution, and how his father apparently beat his youngest sibling on the regular; how his father was a terrible person and the reason he'd become a villain in the first place, and that was the reason why he needed the broker's number, *thank you very much,* so he could find a few contacts that would help him appear respectable and believable enough as a resurfaced civilian to get his brother out of that house. Except they still weren't satisfied, and now they were staring at him like he was a kicked puppy, and Dabi really wanted to burn a hole through the ceiling.

"Man, that's even worse than *my* tragic backstory," Toga sniffled.

"It's not a *tragic backstory.* It's life. So can I have the-"

"Your father is a shithead!" Spinner yelled out. Twice nodded along in agreement with him. "We should kill him!"

"Fascinating," Dabi drawled. "Can I-"

He grunted when Toga collided with his chest, wrapping around him like a koala and sounding like she was near tears. "Oh, that's so terrible, Dabi! You should have told us sooner! We could have taken revenge!" He scowled in response, frustrated, and felt his palms start to heat up as a hand patted him on the shoulder.

"That *is* a terrible story," Compress agreed. "We must rescue your brother from such filth before he turns out like your father." Goddammit.

"Shigaraki, can I just-"

"Okay," Shigaraki interrupted him, and in any other circumstance, Dabi might've shot a fireball at his head, but he just felt relieved, right now. The 'leader' of this ragtag joke of an organization (from Dabi's point of view, anyway) got up and folded up the napkin in his hands, putting it in his shirt pocket. "Everyone get ready, we're going."

Dabi's relief was rapidly replaced by exasperation. "Why the fuck is everyone going?! I can go on my own!"

"Yeah!" Toga cried. "Revenge!"

"We'll totally help you out! *Endeavor is a piece of shit, we should take him out first-"*

"I'll get my coat!"

Shigaraki gave him a stare that just screamed *I'm being a little shit on purpose.* Oh, so that's how it was. He was mad that Dabi had been an asshole, and never told them anything, so now he was going to be an asshole, and not tell him anything, and make him suffer through the League trying to 'help' him. "Now, now, Dabi. You should accept help from your allies."

Dabi decided that, if the younger man went back to his room that night and found that shitty little game system with a hole burnt through it, that would be good enough revenge for now.

Izuku had just gotten through dumping a whole bunch of frozen chicken nuggets into Keigo's freezer, after they spent an hour figuring out how to use a drill to change the poor man's locks, when his phone buzzed. He recognized the vibration pattern to be that of an emergency news alert, and kicked the freezer shut while sliding his phone out, heart skipping a beat when he saw what was going on.

"Keigo!" he yelled, jogging out of the kitchen while he scrolled. "Keigo!"

A quick zip of red flashed in his vision. In a moment, Keigo was standing in front of him, looking startled. "Izuku, what is it-"

Izuku held up his phone. "It's Hosu," he explained. "Nomu like the one that was at USJ. One of our friends is interning there."

"Well, shit," Keigo muttered, taking his phone to give the short article a quick peruse. "Okay, we'll head over. Hey, Shouto, Fumikage! Get your gear on!"

They left his apartment in a flurry of motion. Keigo swept up Shouto to fly, leaving Izuku to push Fumikage along since he could achieve a higher speed, on their way to the train station. Izuku couldn't fly quite as fast as him yet, so it would take less time.

"Yeah, yeah, we're almost there," Keigo said into his phone, having called his supposed 'friend' on the way there. They jogged down the

steps towards the train, which was still at a standstill despite having been supposed to leave five minutes beforehand. "How'd you get here so fast? Yeah, yeah, go ahead and brag-"

They crested the last set of steps and spotted the train. By a set of open doors, Izuku could see a Pro with stark white hair and quite the recognizable outfit, and he nearly held his breath from excitement. Miruko was there, with a nervous-looking Ochako, who was fiddling with her hands but looking determined.

"Hey, birdbrain!" she yelled, hanging up when she saw Hawks coming towards them. She slammed a heavy hand against the train. "Commandeered for an emergency ride. Hop to it!"

Keigo snorted audibly. He fell into step beside the other Pro, who was even more intimidating up close, and they stepped inside. Izuku rushed for Ochako, meeting her hug mid-way, and took a moment to embrace her before pulling her along with him as they entered. "Are you okay?"

"I've been doing pretty good, actually," she replied, eyebrows pulled together in worry as they took their seats in the empty car. "Miruko's friendlier than I thought she'd be, and she's so strong! It's been a really tough week, but I'm really glad I chose her. But- how've you guys been?"

"This week has been a mad banquet of darkness," Fumikage replied, placing a calming hand on Dark Shadow's head as the artificial lights flickered overhead. The train had taken off at a higher speed than usual. "We have learned much."

"It's been great," Izuku translated, jumping when the train rattled. "I'm just worried about Tenya."

"Yeah, me too! He hasn't been answering my texts!"

"I'll just punch the shit out of it, I'm sure that'll be satisfactory," the confident voice of Miruko floated over to them. The woman was slapping her fist into her palm, looking like she was happy to get the chance to fight. Beside her, Keigo smiled, holding up his hands.

"Whatever you say, whatever you say. Just don't be too reckless."

"Hah! You need to loosen up more! That's what I always say, you know-"

Izuku tuned out their conversation again. It was kind of nice, seeing Keigo have a friend who wasn't fifteen. He reached across the aisle and placed a hand on Ochako's. "We'll find him," he promised, sure of it, mostly because he'd hacked into Tenya's social media while they'd been sitting there to get the tracking information from his phone. "I swear."

Ochako gave him a weak smile in response.

Of course, *their specific* train had to have a Nomu crash through it when they were in the city. Izuku should have seen it coming, he supposed, but, at least no civilians had been in it.

"You guys okay?" Hawks' voice yelled from above. Izuku was coughing on the smoke, unsure of how he'd gotten to the ground, before realizing there was a tiny red feather attached to each of them. They'd deposited the four of them on the sidewalk, well away from the wreckage on the train track, and among the rubble, he saw Miruko tangled up with the Nomu with one fist reared back for a punch.

"We're all right!" Fumikage yelled up.

Hawks came to rest on the stable part of the railing. He glanced down at them, giving them all a look-over, before nodding. "All right," he called back. "Miruko and I are going to handle the Nomu. You guys go find your friend, and focus on any civilian rescue, and *stay together*. Got it?" They all nodded. "Good! You have permission to fight! Get going!"

Izuku slipped out his phone. "This way," he ordered, then took off running. The beacon on his GPS was in a back alley, far from any of the danger points in the city he'd noted on the news, which made him worry. There wasn't any good reason Tenya should have been in a place like that. Unless he was hiding, but Tenya wasn't someone who would hide.

That was probably a bad thing, in this situation.

Suddenly, he got a very, very bad feeling.

He looked briefly over his shoulder. "I'm going to leap ahead, just a little, all right? Just keep going this way!"

Shouto and Fumikage nodded at him. Ochako looked unsure, but after a split second, she nodded as well, and he pushed off. He rose into the

air at an impressive speed, thanks to Full Cowling, and shot off like a bullet, looking down at the alleys and buildings below with a bird's eye view.

His eyes caught on two forms, one holding the unmistakable glint of steel, and he felt relieved for following his intuition.

He shot down, with the ferocity of a tiger, and very narrowly saved Tenya from getting his throat cut.

"Mi...dor...i...ya...?"

The strain in Tenya's voice fueled the white-hot anger bubbling beneath Izuku's skin. He felt like it was funneling his vision, channeling it down until the only thing he saw was the scraggly figure in front of him that was undoubtedly the Hero Killer. Both Native and Tenya were on the ground, unmoving, and the rushing in his ears wouldn't go away.

Danger.

"Run," Native barked out, wincing. "You can't fight him-! He only wants us-"

"I'm not leaving," Izuku intoned, eyes nearly humming in the darkness around them. They were eerie, *cold*, and it was unsettling- frightening, even, Tenya thought, even from his place on the ground being defended. He'd never seen his friend look so...mad. "How badly are you two hurt?"

"N-not extremely bad, but, Midoriya, his Quirk-" Tenya gritted out, frustrated with his body's inability to move. "He only cut me once, but I can't move, I think that's his Quirk-"

"Judging by how quickly he tried to kill you, I'm guessing it wears off."

Tenya paused. The thought hadn't occurred to him. Yet, the Hero Killer did seem quick- maybe not urgent, but quick- about his business, not hesitating to try and end a life.

"So a friend rushed to save you," Stain called out, twirling his sword to get a better grip on it. "That's a nice line. But you should know that if you get involved, *you'll be culled like the rest."*

A shiver went down Tenya's spine. It was the same sensation he'd felt

a few moments before, when he'd been about to die. It was the stark feeling of knowing that he was facing someone who truly didn't care to get blood on his hands, who thought he was *right*, who had the intent and means to kill him- his gaze felt like it burned, like it peeled his skin off.

Then he looked at Izuku, and if possible, became even more freaked out, because the boy's expression wasn't scared- it wasn't intimidated- it wasn't bothered in the slightest, If anything, he looked angrier, colder. His eyes seemed to glow in the darkness, like he wasn't even human, like the only thing he was doing was sizing Stain up and analyzing how much of a threat he was.

Every nerve in Izuku's body felt like it was on alert. He felt as though he'd spent his entire time at Yuuei just waiting, in tense silence, for a moment like this, a moment he knew would happen, a moment he expected around every corner; someone preying on his friends, someone threatening them, someone who needed to be dealt with.

And he would deal with it.

None of his friends were dying today.

Stain tilted his head at him. He seemed almost fascinated with him, with the fact that he looked so unbothered.

The sound of running footsteps approached from behind. He heard Ochako let out a low gasp, immediately rushing to kneel beside Tenya, and Shouto and Fumikage came to a stop on either side of him.

He counted at least five visible blade handles on the Hero Killer's figure. "He has a lot of knives and swords, probably more hidden in his clothes. I'm guessing that none of them are particularly special, if he has so many, and his Quirk relies on cutting you. It's a paralysis Quirk, but I think it has a time limit; he probably needs to do something with your blood to activate it. Both of you defend from a distance, and Ochako, you back me up."

"Dark Shadow," Fumikage rumbled, calling his partner out into the darkness. Izuku knew he would have more trouble controlling it at night, and without needing to be asked, Shouto's left side lit up in flames to help keep it calm.

Izuku reached for the long dagger he kept on his belt, in the same spot Aizawa kept his, and drew it out.

Then he sprinted forward, without saying anything.

Eliminate the threat. No time for interrogating.

If there was one thing he was sure of, it was that Stain was indeed a great threat. He had evaded capture for months, killing Heroes wherever he went, and when Izuku dashed under his swing, he withdrew a knife and tried to cut him with a speed fast enough to nearly surpass Full Cowling. Izuku ducked, metal sliding on metal as he blocked with his blade, and rolled to a stop behind the man, Black Whip wrapped around his wrist. He'd let it out while he slid, effectively wrapping it around one of the swords without announcing the gesture, and yanked hard, sending the weapon sailing through the air.

Stain turned, eyes flickering over to him, almost feral with their intensity. Ice erupted across the ground, going for his feet, and he leapt to the side, spinning in midair to box Dark Shadow in the jaw before it could bite into him. Izuku lunged at him again, thinking that he couldn't afford to hesitate; any hesitation meant he would slow down, and if he doubted any of his movements, Stain would take advantage of it. They had the advantage, now, since they outnumbered him, but if he was able to cut any of them, he could start to pick them off.

Stain swung at him after parrying his dagger. Before Izuku could dodge it, a loud yell caught his attention, and a flash of pink shot across his field of vision. It was Ochako, using her Quirk to swing herself through the air at a high speed, letting it go just before she connected and striking Stain in the face with her heel hard enough to send him flying.

Stain ducked under a fireball, then blocked Dark Shadow with a grunt, then barely evaded Izuku's Full-Cowling-powered punch before being targeted by Ochako again. They worked seamlessly, attacks following the others' without needing verbal confirmation, and if they'd been any less coordinated Izuku suspected they would have been cut already. It was a testament to the Hero Killer's skill, he thought, that he was able to combat all four of them at once, but his movements were becoming more erratic, more frenzied, confirming his suspicion that the man's Quirk had a time limit. Either Native or Tenya were going to get up soon.

Ochako threw herself into an odd position. Remembering her bout with Bakugou, Izuku realized quickly what she meant to do and

dashed backwards, using Float to get out of the way faster. Rubble and pieces of ice that had been broken that even he hadn't noticed hailed down from above, blocked and sliced through by the sword in Stain's hand.

"You have good friends, *Ingenium,*" he called out, mockingly. "But you all should be *culled!*"

Izuku held up his hand in a gesture he knew Ochako would recognize. She floated herself out of the way, in the nick of time, as he let a colossal shockwave loose with a flick of his fingers, sending Stain hurtling towards the entry to the alleyway.

They immediately dashed after him, striking together, pushing him back when he blocked with the blunt of his blade with their combined force. As they left Tenya's line of vision, they heard him yell out, voice strained. "Uraraka! Midoriya-!"

The street was empty. It was a good thing, too, because the fight became even more messy in the open air. "None of us are going to be *culled*," Izuku spat in the man's face, ducking so Dark Shadow could take a swipe. "You claim you're cleaning up hero society, but you don't even know who you're *targeting!* Ingenium *was* a good hero, like All Might, and you couldn't even do a little *research.*"

Stain's eyebrow twitched. He scowled, or maybe grimaced, and swung a blade Izuku hadn't seen.

The piece of sidewalk they were both crouched on, for a split second, glowed with pink energy. Ochako let out a yell of exertion as she raised her hands, yanking it from the ground, and floated it into the sky. Izuku leapt off, hovering in midair, using a mass of tendrils from Black Whip to combat Stain instead of his fists. He managed to capture both the man's arms, but he changed tactics and instead lunged at him, pulling himself along with them. Izuku, however, had figured he would, and let himself drop, landing in a crouch while Stain went sailing into one of Dark Shadow's attacks. It let out an incensed roar, nearly double its usual size, feeding off the darkness around them and unaffected by any of the villain's blades.

"You were right before," he heard Ochako yell, not needing to look at her to know where she was. "Ingenium *does* have good friends! We aren't letting you hurt him!"

Izuku heard footsteps. He saw Tenya emerge from the alley, back on his feet, and come to a stop behind Shouto and Fumikage, standing

there with wide eyes.

He nodded at Ochako, who stood across the street from him. They both took off at a run, aiming for the center, as Dark Shadow threw Stain straight towards the ground.

"Smash!"

"Take this, asshole!"

Izuku heard the cracking of bone as they both slammed their fists into Stain's head. It turned, at a concerning angle, but he knew it hadn't killed him, because they'd both calculated how much force to use. Then Stain went crashing to the ground, and ice rose up around him, and Dark Shadow came crashing down on his head again.

Then he was finished, and the danger was over.

Native had some rope on him that they used to tie the Hero Killer up. It had been a relatively short fight, all things considered, only taking a few minutes, but it felt like it had lasted much longer.

"Looks like you were right, Midoriya," said Shouto as he crouched on the street, looking over Stain's impressive array of weaponry. "He had a lot stashed on him."

Before Izuku could muster up a response, there was a gust of air as Keigo landed a few yards away from them. He looked over the scene with raised eyebrows, staring at Stain for a minute, before jogging over and waving for his interns to lean in. "Okay, if anybody asks, you guys did all the fighting."

"We kind of did that anyway," Ochako pointed out. "I think they caught it, too."

She pointed down the street. Izuku followed her line of sight; a news caster was speaking excitedly into a camera, gesturing with her hands, smiling as she turned and started trotting towards them. "All right," Hawks sighed. "I'll do the talking."

He put on a friendly smile and waved as he started walking to meet the news crew midway. The students stood there, rather awkwardly, for a minute before Izuku turned to look for who they'd come to find in the first place. Ochako realized what he was looking at and did the same, running over to grasp Tenya's arm and trying to get a look at his

wound. "Tenya! Are you okay?"

Izuku felt an indescribable feeling of guilt when he saw his friend's face. He was standing a few feet apart from the rest of them, and for lack of better word, he looked *lost*. He stepped back when Ochako reached for him, averting his eyes to the ground. "Tenya...?"

"This...this had nothing to do with you," he said, voice wavering. "It had nothing to do with any of you, yet...because of me, you all still had to come and risk your lives to save me. And in the end, I couldn't do- *anything*. I was...I was useless!"

Ochako pulled her hands back, staring at him with sad eyes. Shouto and Fumikage both stared at the ground, unsure of what to say to him, and Izuku's heart ached.

Useless.

He knew what it felt like to feel useless.

"That's okay."

The four of them looked at him. "W-what?" Tenya stammered, blinking a few times as if to bring him into focus.

Izuku smiled as softly as he could. "That's okay," he repeated, letting his gaze fall. "You know, it's...it's okay to rely on your friends sometimes. To have to be saved, sometimes. Besides, you weren't useless- you gave me information on the Hero Killer, information that made it easier to take him down."

"But...but after what I said- how I acted- you still-"

"You're my friend. Even if you were mad at me, I couldn't just stand by and watch you get hurt. Meddling where one doesn't belong is essential to being a Hero, you know?"

Izuku walked over to him, only a little hesitant, and reached out to place his fingers on his skin through the tear in his shirt. He closed his eyes to concentrate, wincing when a piercing sort of pain appeared in his arm. "Midoriya?" Tenya exclaimed, sounding alarmed when he hunched over.

Izuku felt the wound close up. He retracted his hand, moving it to hold his own arm as he cringed. He'd broken his entire arm, before, but it appeared stabbing was a special sort of pain that felt like it cut

to the bone. Tenya let out a startled noise as he looked for the wound he'd acquired.

"What- what did you do?!"

"I-it's fine," Izuku said with a shaky smile, straightening himself up and rubbing his bicep. "It's a...another use of my Quirk I found. I can heal people- convenient, isn't it?" He'd tried for a light tone, but Tenya was still staring at him in concern.

"By taking their pain in exchange? Midoriya-! You...you can't just-"

"Are you okay?" Ochako interrupted, staring at him with worry on her face.

"I'm fine, honest. It's...all fine. I'm...really sorry. I know I probably had...no place, really, trying to convince you not to come here, but...I just couldn't stand the thought of something happening to you, like what happened to the other Heroes. I...sorry."

Izuku stared at the ground, feeling like sinking into a puddle on the sidewalk. Maybe if he'd tried talking to Tenya, first, instead of ratting him out to Aizawa-sensei, he could have avoided this altogether.

"Midoriya..." Tenya had begun to cry, now, staring at him like he'd just stabbed him himself. "I- Izuku. I'm...so sorry. You didn't deserve what I said to you last week. Here I am, having to be saved by you twice, and you...never even hesitated. To do all of this for me. You...are selfless in a way I can't compare to. Please, please- forgive me."

In what felt like his darkest moment, when he was certain he wasn't going to make it out, Izuku had been there, appearing like an angel full of wrath. They had *all* been there, even when Tenya had pushed them away, just to protect him. He felt like he couldn't look any of them in the face.

But he did, and saw the tears in Izuku's eyes, and felt a rush of guilt. He stumbled forward and wrapped his arms around the smaller student, not knowing what else he could do, pressing his eyes shut as he buried his face in green hair. "I promise I will do my best not to worry any of you like this again!"

Ochako sniffled. "Oh, Tenya..."

Izuku didn't make a noise, but he shook, and Tenya felt even worse, remembering how his eyes had looked when he yelled at him. He'd

been too angry at the time to realize how stupid he was being, but he'd made Izuku cry then too. He was *never* going to do it again.

He didn't deserve such a good friend.

A loud screech startled them all. They jumped, all of them stumbling to get a look at whatever the hell had made that noise, and Izuku twisted his neck to look at the sky. Hawks' cry of *"Get down!"* went nearly unnoticed.

Before he could react properly, still thrown by the pain of using the healing Quirk and facing Iida's apology, a giant claw was wrapped around him, and the ground wasn't beneath his feet anymore.

"Izuku!"

He wasn't so much scared of being high up- he *could* fly- but it was the fact that a Nomu had, for some reason, dive-bombed him and now was in a great position to skewer him in several vital organs that made him let out a cry of surprise.

And yet, before the Nomu got too far, it was frozen in midair, and a figure was careening towards them-

Stain skewered the Nomu's brain with a knife, much to the surprise of everyone down below, and Izuku felt electricity hum along his skin as the man reached out and wrapped one arm around his torso to make sure he didn't crack his head open on the concrete as they slammed into the ground. He felt frozen, like he could hardly move, like he could do nothing but merely lay there on the concrete as the Hero Killer hovered close enough to hit him with the knife.

What the hell?!

"Fake heroes...villains who wave their power around...they must *all* be purged to create a more just society..." Stain growled out, eyes wild as he straightened up. The one-eighty in behavior had thrown Izuku for a loop, because he couldn't predict it, couldn't understand why he was doing it.

Why did he-

He yelped when hands grabbed hold of him and pulled him away. Hawks sped past Stain with blinding speed, snatching him up from the ground, landing yards away with both wings poised to block any sort of attack and arms wrapped around him. As soon as the knife was far

enough away he could use his speed to grab him, he had, and he looked pissed, an expression Izuku had never seen before; he felt his throat close up.

He could predict a lot, but at that moment, he felt like the situation started to become overwhelming, even for him. He had no idea what the hell was going on.

"The villain went this way!" a voice yelled out, and of *course* it was Endeavor who came around the corner. Izuku could see the news reporter and a pack of heroes he hadn't seen arrive gawking at them, frozen in place, which apparently pissed him off. "What are you standing around for? There-!"

He panicked, briefly, when the man heated up a large flame. Hawks was very flammable, after all, and he was currently holding him in the line of fire, which wasn't a great combination.

"Don't!" a different voice yelled out. Miruko landed, making a small crater under her feet, sending a scowl Endeavor's way that made him pause. "Fucking dumbass!" Ah. So that was where Ochako had gotten the language from.

"Endeavor..." Stain's voice caught their attention again, and Izuku felt a brief chill go down his spine at the Hero Killer's expression. For whatever reason, he wasn't focused on them anymore- wasn't focused on *Izuku-* instead staring at the number two hero, looking livid and ready to murder. Quite literally. "You *fake*...come, try and get me, *fake!* The only one I will allow to kill me...is All Might! The *true hero!*"

Then he dropped the knife, passing out while he stood there.

Izuku had to admit he was impressed.

For a minute, no one moved at all. He could see the heroes were freaked out, which made him feel marginally better; he had a feeling everyone there was freaked out.

Shouto broke first. His brow crinkled in concern as he took off at a run, flying past the immobile Stain, and stopped in front of Hawks, his hand emitting cool air. "Are you hurt?"

"J-just some bruises from landing..."

The boy held an icy, soothing hand over his wrist that was starting to turn red. Hawks let out a light sigh. Whether he was relieved or not,

Izuku couldn't quite tell, but he did let go of the giant feather blade Izuku hadn't noticed he'd been holding.

The heroes approached Stain to tie him up again with only a bit of hesitation. Miruko jogged over to Ochako, a grin on her face as she went to congratulate her intern, apparently not needing to ask to know she'd fought hard.

And, if Endeavor looked mildly insulted that Shouto was ignoring him, none of them mentioned it, because it was too funny to ruin.

Sunday morning broke with a news storm about the four interns who had taken down the Hero Killer. First-year interns, at that, and Izuku just knew Aizawa was groaning to himself as he sat at Yuuei reading the articles. He received a slurry of excited texts from his classmates, at various points through the night and early morning, including a teasing *I told you you're fucking OP* from Hitoshi. Keigo appeared in an interview, happily talking them up, and a reporter caught Miruko in passing; she grinned like a shark and said her intern had 'kicked fuckin' ass,' which the program had to censor.

Shouto continued to ghost his father, bringing a fruit basket to the hospital that Tensei was at, and Tenya looked happy to have them all there, even more regretful that he'd pushed them away for the past two weeks. Izuku was a little sad that their internships were over, but he was glad to go back to class, where he could see *all* of his friends and support them.

"I figured he might like some flowers," Ochako said, holding a gigantic pot of carnations. "Um, they're supposed to be hypoallergenic!"

Tenya gave her a grateful smile. "I think he'll appreciate it. Thank you, Ochako."

Ochako blushed and set the pot down on a table in the waiting area they were in. Izuku watched them, watched as Shouto offered an awkward but genuine condolence about the whole thing, and Fumikage let Dark Shadow out to mingle and pet Tenya on the head, looking heartbroken, and Tenya allowed himself to absorb some comfort from his friends.

...then he snuck away, knowing they probably wouldn't approve of his plan.

He slipped into Tensei's room and marveled at how much they looked

alike. He knew they were brothers, but if Tensei were older, he could have passed for Tenya's parent, too. Anxiously, he approached the bed, hoping the man was asleep, and thankfully, he was. It would be awkward to answer to what he was doing.

After a moment of hesitation, Izuku laid his hands on the man's bare arm.

I can do this...

He had to. For Tenya.

The pain was unimaginable. One of those quiet voices that spoke to him in his head had appeared the night before, as a warning, not just an encouragement. *Be careful how you use it. You can heal, but at a cost. The pain is not just reflected onto you, but doubled.* Mend was an advantage, no doubt, but if he couldn't handle the pain, he couldn't heal anyone.

He bent over as the pain intensified. At some point, there was nothing more to take, and he let go, letting himself slip onto the floor with a whimper. He wasn't sure how long he had been standing there. But he hadn't passed out- well, yet- and he could still just rest for a minute, wait, and slip back to the others...

That...really hurt.

He opened his eyes when he heard a rustling noise. A confused face appeared at the edge of the bed, peering down at him with palpable confusion. "Hi," he croaked out, trying to wave.

"...Hello?" Iida Tensei said, eyebrows furrowing, obviously concerned.

All right, so maybe this had been a dumb idea, but it was totally worth it, because Tenya was going to be so happy after he got through with yelling at him, he would just...have to wait until he felt better to go see him. Because he was pretty sure he was passing out now.

But still. Worth it.

Aizawa-sensei was so going to tear his hair out.

jesus, what a day

"Uh, excuse me! I found this boy passed out in my room?"

"Wha- how are you walking?!"

"I...am not entirely sure."

Izuku was vaguely aware of the conversation happening around him whilst someone carried him somewhere. He was pretty sure he remembered what happened, but he was also very confused, and everything but the immediate voices beside him was a loud blur. He felt like someone with a gigantification Quirk had stepped on him, then kicked him into the sea, and a shark had throttled him for a while. Every new noise made another pulse of pain course through his forehead and down his spine.

Whoever had been speaking set him down into a chair. He groaned, both because he moved and because a hand that felt like ice touched his neck.

"His pulse feels good. Do you know what happened-"

"Tensei?!"

Was that Tenya? Izuku opened his eyes a sliver, and it was, standing at the end of the hall looking like he was seeing a ghost. He took off at a run, and whoever was standing behind him grunted when the other teenager collided with him. "Tensei! How are you...what...how are you all right?!"

"That's what I'm wondering," the voice from before said, sounding halfway between amused and tired. "These painkillers they put me on gave me a massive headache, but otherwise, I feel perfectly fine."

"We're still going to have to give you a physical to check for injuries," the other voice said.

Izuku could almost pinpoint the exact moment Tenya looked at him. Nervous, he let out a weak smile, prying his eyes open again, and he could see Tenya standing there, the gears turning in his head. After a few moments, his face twisted up in exasperation and incredulity. "Izuku! What on earth did you do?"

"Tenya! Is everything ok?" It was then their other friends came trotting

around the corner, Ochako still holding that pot of flowers, and paused, looking between them all in palpable confusion. Ochako stalled. "Uh..."

"You are so RECKLESS!" Tenya nearly shrieked, kneeling in front of him and chopping the air with every other word. "You cannot just run around healing every serious injury you see! Tensei's SPINE was crushed! Do you know how dangerous that was?! You could have given yourself a concussion passing out! Y-"

"Wait, did you say he has a healing Quirk?" the second voice, which he could now tell was a nurse, interrupted.

"Er- yes. From what he said, he can heal others' injuries through skin contact by absorbing the pain of the injury, somehow."

"Wait, he absorbed *all* that pain?" the voice of Tenya's brother said, sounding startled. "Wha- why?"

"Doesn't matter right now," the nurse half-yelled, taking hold of the wheelchair he was sitting in and turning it around. "I'm taking him upstairs to be looked at by someone from Quirk over-usage. Iida-san, please return to your room, we still need to check you over. I'll have someone come in in just a few minutes."

Being wheeled down the hallway so quickly made him feel a little nauseous. Izuku let himself drift off to sleep again, despite the nurse asking him to try not to, to get a break from the pain.

He woke to the steady beeping of a heart monitor.

"Hey, I think he's waking up," a voice that was clearly Ochako's whispered. Izuku opened his eyes, immediately squinting due to the light streaming in from the window, and grimaced. "Izuku? How do you feel?"

"Terrible," he muttered.

"They gave you a sedative, but I imagine that you will, for a while," said Tenya, sitting by the bed to his left. His arms were folded and his face was frozen in a deep frown. "The doctor said you have a mild fever and will most likely feel the effects of using your Quirk for several days. I reiterate, this was so reckless, Izuku! You could have gotten hurt!"

"Sorry," Izuku said, sheepishly, and Tenya sighed before shaking his head resolutely to himself.

"I'm afraid I will have to explain this to Aizawa-sensei."

"Wh, c-c'mon, Tenya, he's going to be so mad!"

"As he should be! Such reckless use of a part of your Quirk you only discovered recently- and after you just had to save me from my own recklessness!"

A different voice interrupted. "Now, now, don't be too hard on him, Tenya," said Tensei, appearing at his brother's shoulder and placing a hand on it with a smile. He was no longer dressed in a hospital gown, but a change of clothes similar to what Tenya usually wore in his downtime. "It may have been reckless, but it was a noble thing to do."

Seeing someone with, basically, Tenya's face be so casual was bound to give him whiplash. Izuku's brow furrowed as the man reached down and grasped his hand, giving it a gentle shake. "You're quite a selfless young man, putting yourself at risk for a friend's family. I would have preferred to get better via a different method, one that didn't involve you needing to go through this kind of pain, but I have to thank you. Because of you, I'll be able to return to Hero work."

"Uh...it's no trouble," Izuku mumbled out, turning red now that everyone was staring at him and Ochako was trying to cover up a smile with her hands. Tenya appeared to lose steam at his brother's prompting, slumping over and letting out a long sigh.

"I...yes, thank you, Izuku. I am sorry if I appear mad. You just worried us all to death. But...*please*. Please be more careful! You have people who care about you, who don't want to see you hurt, which you just taught *me* last night! I am glad that my brother is all right, but I don't want to trade one person for the other. At least promise me you will go to see Recovery Girl and get help controlling this ability."

Izuku felt a brief rush of guilt. He'd known, rationally, that they would all be worried, of course, but knowing and seeing were two different things. It occurred to him that they were all probably still on edge from the day before, and just glad that he wasn't hurt, but, well...the benefit still outweighed the risk in his mind. Knowing Tenya's brother would be all right was worth any amount of pain.

But, he supposed that he could...work on controlling it better, so maybe he would worry people less.

"Okay. I will. Are you still telling sensei?"

"Oh, most definitely."

Fumikage and Ochako chuckled under their breath as Izuku pouted. Before their conversation could continue much farther, a nurse walked into the room, a clipboard in her hands, and gave them all a smile. "Sorry, everyone, but I'll need you guys to vacate the room so I can bring the doctor in and ask some questions to get some information for Midoriya-kun's Quirk counseling." Well, he supposed he would *have* to get help, anyway, since the hospital would probably disclose the reason behind his stay to at least his mother.

His friends started to get up and funnel out. Shouto paused, looking awkward, by the foot of the bed, and looked over at the nurse, rubbing the back of his neck. He looked almost embarrassed. "Erm...can I stay for a moment?"

The nurse glanced up and looked at him. After a moment, she let out a giggle, giving him a wave. "Sure, sweetheart. I'll be back in a few minutes."

Looking mildly perturbed- probably because of the endearment- Shouto watched the nurse leave before hesitantly walking over to stand beside his bed, frowning at his body- which appeared, for all intents and purposes, okay, but he knew wasn't- before meeting his eyes.

"Are you...all right?"

"I'm fine," Izuku said with what he hoped was a convincing smile, even though his back felt like it was quite literally on fire. "Just kind of warm. Probably the fever."

Shouto, again, looked hesitant. He averted his eyes to the bed blankets. "If you...want, I can use my ice."

"Please?"

It had felt pretty good on his bruises the night before. Shouto slowly sat down, his skin becoming chilly to even be near, and Izuku didn't even think about curling closer to him. It felt good- soothing- something to focus his mind on other than the pain from Mend.

He'd gradually tugged Shouto completely onto the bed by the time the nurse got back via falling asleep on him, and she let the other boy

stay, muttering about how cute it was while she arranged a sliding table with a laptop on it. Shouto looked a bit like a deer caught in headlights, but he didn't dislike the feeling, and he eventually settled one arm around him, the sensation of being held foreign and unfamiliar yet...good.

Izuku's fever took a dive after about an hour cuddling into Shouto's cold side. The hospital discharged him that afternoon, with a set of printed instructions about not over-exerting himself for a week, and a mass of reporters were gathered outside when they emerged. Ochako, who had ahold of his arm for support, crowded closer to him, eyebrows pulling together as they waved microphones at them and yelled questions.

"Are you the Yuuei students who defeated the Hero Killer?"

"Who was hurt during the altercation? The footage didn't show any injuries!"

"You three came in the top three for the Sports Festival, didn't you?"

"Hey, hey, hey!" Keigo yelled out, flapping his wings like an angry bird to get the reporters to back up. He pointed the end of one at a particularly pushy man, giving them an unimpressed stare. "Leave my chicks alone. I already gave a statement on the news. Let's let them get home, yeah?"

Izuku's mother was beside herself when he got home. He could tell she'd been pacing for a while, as evidenced by the pot of tea on the stove, because she only ever made tea to pace with or to relax with, and she definitely wasn't relaxed. "Oh, my baby!" she cried, latching onto him as soon as he was in the door. "I saw you on television! Oh, I'm so proud of you! Was it scary? Are you all right? The hospital called and told me you had to take it easy from overusing your Quirk-"

Izuku didn't like to be mother-henned, usually, but he didn't even argue that night. His mother had probably been worried to death, and he let her sit him down and cook his favorite meal for him and look at him for bruises, wanting to give her at least a little peace of mind.

Shigaraki was acting unhinged again.

It was mostly annoying, and inconvenient, because he was pacing in front of the doorway, and kept turning and marching across it every

time Dabi tried to exit.

"Why didn't it *work*? It never *works*," he hissed to himself, mostly unnoticed by Toga and Spinner on the sofa. "And he was there *again*, acting like some end of level boss, why was he there-"

"I need to leave," Dabi intoned, just barely clamping down on the urge to commit indoor arson.

Toga lit up suddenly, twisting around on the couch to look at him. "Oh yeah! You're going to see your brother, right?"

Shigaraki twitched. "Your little *hero* brother," he grumbled, scratching at his neck as he, *again*, came to a stop right in front of the doorway. Why couldn't he have chosen the hall to pace in? "Who helped completely ruin our plans-"

"You know, my little *hero brother* is friends with that green brat you hate," Dabi drawled, though he wasn't sure if hate was quite the right word. The napkin that Shigaraki used as a hit list (yes, a fucking *napkin*) sported three entries of *GREEN BRAT?, BROCCOLI HEAD,* and *MIDORIYA???* Even Shigaraki wasn't sure if he wanted to kill the boy or not. He'd seemed obsessed with him ever since the kid had apparently given him a verbal dressing-down at his failed USJ attack, then appeared on TV to win the Sports Festival as if to personally taunt him by being good at the things he'd criticized in Shigaraki's attempt- that was, *having a brain*- and he'd even had a Nomu attempt to kidnap him, only to have *Stain himself* turn traitor to save him. So yeah, the green bean wasn't currently on the hit list, but Shigaraki would probably add him at least two more times in his confused attempts to sort out what he was thinking. "If you let me fucking leave so I can go talk to him, *you* can probably talk to that brat."

Shigaraki paused, visibly thinking, before an insane-looking smile appeared on his face. "You're right, Dabi. That is a *great* idea. Let's go, everyone."

"What- *all of you do not need to come with me!"*

But Shigaraki was a little shit, and committed to being a little shit to Dabi specifically now, so that was how Dabi ended up sitting on the shoulders of Compress, who was sitting on an unfortunate Kurogiri's shoulders while Shigaraki and Toga stared up at them from below and barely kept their snickering under control. He glared down at them, deciding that he hated his life quite possibly more than when he was running around on his own stealing pain medication for his fucking

skin staple replacements as he grew, and tapped on Shouto's window. He didn't know why they'd needed to do this in such a *stupid* way, either, instead of using their Quirks or something, but Shigaraki insisted that Compress making a ledge would be too "noisy."

Shouto himself was not asleep, unable to rest after arriving home and merely being glared at by his father before the man retreated into his study. Fuyumi, who was rather nice and friendly but also a nervous wreck, and one he didn't even know well at that, smiled at him and offered him some dinner, but he hadn't had much of an appetite. Even though Fumikage and Izuku had promised to be there with him, the idea of talking to Aizawa was still looming over his head.

He had never talked to anyone about his home life- not in detail- until Izuku. What if Aizawa couldn't do anything at all, and his father found out, and pulled him out of Yuuei?

The tapping at his window caught his attention. For a moment, he just laid there, thinking it might've been a tree branch, but then it happened again, more rapidly. Confused, he sat up and turned to look, frowning when he saw a weird shape outside.

The floor was cold when he slipped out of bed to walk over to the window, but it didn't bother him. He undid the latch and slid it open, frowning when he recognized the head and shoulders of the man he'd met at his internship all the way in Hosu. "Uh..."

"Here," the guy said, holding up a...McDonald's bag? He deposited it into Shouto's arms, snorting when all he did was stare down at it in bewilderment. "It's food."

"I know that," Shouto replied, unsure of what exactly was going on. Had Fuyumi ordered him food? Was the guy a delivery driver? But delivery drivers didn't deliver to second-story windows, or at least, they usually didn't. "How did you find my house?"

"I've been here before," the man replied mysteriously, saying nothing further on the matter. Maybe he *was* a delivery driver. "You didn't eat dinner, did you?"

"...no."

"Old man mad at you?"

A crinkle formed in Shouto's brow. "How did you know that?" he asked, suddenly wondering whether he should be worried or not.

Another snort. "Let's just say I know what it's like."

For a moment, they just sat there in silence, with the man's eyes roving over his form. "Uh...why did you...bring me food?"

Compress gave an encouraging pat to Dabi's thigh. Sighing, he leaned on his elbow. *Why does this part have to be so awkward?* "Do you remember me?"

"Yes?" If possible, Shouto became more confused, raising an eyebrow. "I met you last week."

"No, I mean before that. Do you remember me from before?"

Shouto squinted. "I don't...think so?" It was rather dark out, so he couldn't even properly see the man's face, and the hoodie he was wearing didn't help matters. "Where did we meet?"

"A long time ago," he retorted. "As in a very long time. Look, I...can't explain it right now, but just don't tell anyone I was here. I'll be back tomorrow."

"...Okay?"

Well, he didn't have a problem with it, if someone wanted to come gift him food.

A nearly-inaudible whisper came from outside. "Does this kid have any self-preservation instincts?"

The man scowled. "Lock the window," he grumbled, then disappeared below, leaving Shouto standing there in confusion. When it occurred to him to step forward and look down, there was nobody there, as if he'd been talking to a ghost, and he reached out to do what the man said in silence.

It was confusing, but at least he got free food out of it.

He retreated to his bed and curled up in the corner, where he could drop the bag between it and the wall if someone came into his room unannounced, and started to eat.

"Wow, you look so weird!"

"Thanks," Dabi said dully, which flew completely over Toga's head as she giggled at him. Unfortunately, he'd needed her help to coat

himself in enough makeup to make him look like he had normal skin, because he hadn't yet found anyone with a Quirk that could alter his appearance for long enough, though the League's broker thought he may have a lead to look into soon. It had been a little like pulling teeth to make himself open the bottle of red hair dye he'd bought and coat his bleached hair in it, and it felt a little like straw now, but he needed to look convincing.

Even if he did hate that reflection even more than his scarred, frightening one.

He exited the bathroom and walked down the hall. Shigaraki was sitting at the bar, scribbling something on a piece of paper as he muttered to himself, but he looked up and squinted when Dabi came in. "You look fucking weird."

"That's the general consensus."

Shigaraki snorted and started to ignore him again. The only other person there was Twice, who gaped at him like he'd spontaneously turned into a fish. "You look like you could be a natural redhead! *It looks horrible, change it back!"*

Dabi twitched and headed for the door before Shigaraki randomly called for the entire League to accompany him. This part, at least, was better done by himself, without any idiots around to cause trouble. 'Natural redhead.' The irony.

The train ride over to Musutafu felt like it took forever. Impatiently, he picked at the set of clothes Compress had given him; they put him in a grumpy mood, as they made him feel like some kind of office worker, and he preferred his usual ragged attire. When he got off at his stop, not a single soul looked at him or gave him a sideways glance- it was almost unsettling, after going around for so long with a face that mothers shielded their children's eyes from.

The specific police station he walked into was a familiar one. It was one he'd made a point to avoid, for years, because they'd handled his original missing persons case, and had to close it due to lack of evidence and pronounce him dead with no body to be recovered.

He knocked on the glass at the attending station, startling the officer behind it into looking up. Probably hadn't had his morning coffee yet. "Oh, can I help you?"

"I need to undo a death certificate," Dabi drawled, which made the

man's eyebrows pull together in confusion. "I was pronounced dead about ten years ago. Obviously, I'm not."

"Er, all right. What's your name...?"

And it felt like poison sliding off his tongue. "Todoroki Touya."

gotta keep things cool

Chapter Notes

> p.s. just another reminder to pls not spam! (however I love seeing regulars comment, i see and appreciate u! and ofc people who aren't regulars still count!) but yeah my bnha fics just seem to get a lot of it, so please no emojis, one word comments, etc.!

"You were in the hospital. Again."

"Yes, sensei."

"And it had to do with your Quirk? *Again*?"

"...yes, sensei."

"And let me guess-"

Aizawa paused to glance down at Izuku's discharge instruction paperwork with a flat expression. "You have a healing Quirk, and of course it's destructive towards your body." Izuku smiled sheepishly, making Aizawa narrow his eyes. "Is there something else?"

"W-well, um...it doesn't just transfer the pain...it does that, but doubles it?"

"...are you telling me you're walking around with the pain of a crushed spine and various other injuries twice over?"

A bead of sweat slid down Izuku's face. Looking like he wanted to slap himself in the face with a skillet, Aizawa retrieved a juice pouch from a shelf in the podium back he presumably kept a stash in and shoved it into his hands. "Go rest in the teacher's lounge. You aren't sitting at a desk all day."

"But really sensei, I'm fi-" Izuku started, then pressed his mouth shut when Aizawa gave him a tired, withering stare. "Okay, sensei."

So he took the juice pouch, retreated across school to the empty lounge, found one of the clean blankets they kept in a cabinet, and curled up on the couch. Honestly, after the last few weeks he'd had, it was a nice break.

"Anyone know where Midori is?"

Tenya looked up from methodically measuring out exactly how much salt to put on his bowl of noodles. "Aizawa-sensei told him to go and rest in the lounge, because he was still in pain," he explained, easing Shouto's frown a little. A frown of his own appeared on his face soon thereafter. "Apparently, his Quirk not only allows him to heal others by taking on the pain from their injuries, but *doubles* that pain! I cannot believe he healed Tensei's broken spine and didn't even inform us of that fact..."

Walking along with his lunch tray, one Tsuburaba Kosei choked on his own spit and rapidly turned on his heel to rush off towards his table. His classmates jumped when he slammed his tray down, almost dislodging the glass of milk on it, getting a few dribbles onto the table. "Guys, what the shit."

"What is it, man?" Tetsutetsu asked, shielding his food like the other boy had just committed one of the seven deadly sins by nearly ruining it.

"I was walking by Class 1A's table-"

"Ugggh," Monoma groaned, letting his head flop back. "I swear, every day there's more news about *Class 1A*! Can't we go one day without constantly hearing about them? I'm still disappointed that kid from Gen got transferred into *their* class rather than *ours*..."

"It's not just about 1A, it's about that Midoriya guy," Tsuburaba interrupted, irritated, making a few faces look up at him and tense. "He's got *another* power now!"

"Really?" Shiozaki questioned, frowning. "That seems unlikely..."

"You sure? Because he's already shown he can fly, has super strength, can accelerate his speed, and use those weird black whips...we're gonna call one more crazy?"

A moment of silence passed. Finally, Kendo tilted her head and raised an eyebrow. "Well, what can he do now?"

Tsuburaba grimaced. "He can heal people," he said, making surprise flicker across their faces. "But not like Recovery Girl. Apparently he *absorbs their pain* or some shit and in exchange for fixing whoever's hurt it doubles on him. And he fixed Iida's brother, that Ingenium guy, which meant he came to school with *twice* the pain from a broken

spine!"

They all sat there in immobile shock for a minute. He could see fearful glances passing between his classmates, all reading the same thing; *What the hell is up with that guy?*

"That's an insane pain tolerance!" Tetsutetsu exclaimed, slamming a fist into the table. "God, that's so manly..."

A few Gen Ed students were glancing over at them looking either worried or in awe. The table they usually sat at was close enough to hear. Kendo didn't blame them; after all, Midoriya was obviously *the* most dangerous person in the school. Sure, it had taken a little while for it to become apparent- but after word had gotten around that he'd gotten someone expelled? That a bunch of second years were now afraid to bully anyone after Midoriya just so happened to come upon them in the acts and pick them apart with all the information a dedicated stalker would have? After Midoriya flawlessly won the Sports Festival, practically *manipulated* it to his advantage, planned beforehand? After he'd gotten shot and walked it off like it was nothing, after he'd shown up on television fighting toe-to-toe with the Hero Killer, and *won*? Sure, other 1A students had been helping him, but he'd dove right in without fear and been fighting the villain up close the entire time.

And now apparently he was also strong enough to take on an enormous amount of pain and walk around like normal the next day.

Not to mention the fact that the few times someone from 1B had tried to ask about him, one of the girls from 1A whipped around with a glare on their face and immediately rebutted with a just-aggressive-enough-to-be intimidating *Why do you want to know?* The kid practically had a gang.

Yeah, Midoriya was terrifying.

The worst part about it all was he seemed so...*sweet.* Like he could smile at someone's face one minute and shiv them the next. He was so good at that ruse that *no one* who hadn't seen it with their own eyes would believe he was actually a mastermind. Kendo didn't even mean that in a bad way- she thought he was nice enough, when no one pissed him off- but that was probably what made it so...eerie. Someone who was *faking* being nice? She could usually sense those ones out. But someone who was genuinely nice, and turned into a Tasmanian devil when provoked? *Dangerous.*

Yet, there was something admirable about it, too. He only set off on people who blatantly hurt or bullied people at school, or people who hurt his friends. There was a saying- *get on board or get out of the way.* Kendo had a feeling that Midoriya was someone to get the hell on board with.

Which was why it was monumentally stupid for Monoma to piss him off.

"Always bragging about that stupid broccoli head, I'm gonna give them a piece of my mind," the boy muttered, trying to stand, and Kendo karate chopped him on the head, making him fall into his mashed potatoes. That was for the best, for his safety and their class's.

"No one say he said stupid broccoli head," Honenuki whispered, and they all nodded in unspoken agreement.

A hand shaking him awake brought Izuku out of his slumber. He'd been dreaming again, about far-off figures he couldn't quite make out, just out of his reach; he felt as though he'd somehow gotten some more information, even though he couldn't remember any conversation- just some kind of intuition about the new Quirks he was trying to use. The movement, however, brought him back to the real world, and he opened his eyes with a grimace. The first thing he saw was the clock, the hand at nearly two, which meant he'd slept through lunch.

Predictably, he let out a groan. Some of the pain in his spine was gone, but he still felt pretty cruddy overall- sleeping during the day did that to him.

"My boy? How are you feeling?"

Oh shit, he thought, immediately jerking up, which made him moan again. Concerned, All Might- or, Toshinori, in that state- grabbed his shoulders.

"Don't overdo it! I'm sorry, did I startle you?"

"No, it's fine," Izuku mumbled, feeling a rush of embarrassment creep up his neck. He let himself sit back against the couch cushions, fighting with the blanket for a moment to get it off, and tried to stretch out his shoulders. It made him flinch just to try.

And, of course, there was the frown on Toshinori's face as he looked

him up and down. "Did Aizawa-sensei talk to you?" Izuku asked, already dreading the answer.

"Yes, he did. I was-"

"I'm sorry," Izuku blurted out, looking down when Toshinori looked at him. "I just went and did something stupid *again*...and hurt myself again..." *I'm such a screw-up.*

"You are most certainly *not*," Toshinori nearly yelled, scaring the crap out of him, not realizing he'd muttered it instead of thinking it, as he did with most thoughts in his everyday life. Toshinori grabbed him by the shoulders again, a frown entrenched into his face, and gave him such an intense stare he couldn't bring himself to avert his eyes again. "Yes, what you did was reckless, and perhaps unwise, but I am sure you've received enough lecturing on that already. Everyone makes reckless mistakes when they're young. Underneath that recklessness was a noble desire to help your friend. You put someone else before your own well-being." Just how much Izuku *did* disregard his own well-being was a pressing matter, but one for another discussion. "And that was an amazing thing to do. I'm proud of you, my boy."

Izuku didn't realize he'd started to tear up until his vision began to get blurry. "Really?" he croaked, wanting to wipe at his eyes but to embarrassed to.

Be careful, All Might.

He looks up to you like you're the only star in the sky.

If you're ever callous with him, it won't just hurt his feelings. It will scar him forever.

Toshinori swallowed a lump in his throat. In truth, he'd had to sit through almost an hour long briefing with the principal and Aizawa- and Midoriya's mother. It had to have been the worst hour of his life, even considering that terrible time in the hospital after he was injured. They'd thrown around words that Toshinori was familiar with, intimately so in some cases, but never in regards to a child- *depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, haphephobia, acousticophobia*. He hadn't even known what that last one *meant.*

It had awed him, and horrified him, to hear just how badly Midoriya's old schools had neglected him. The teachers singled him out, left him open to being targeted by other students...students who bullied him, did more than just give him scrapes and bruises, but called him

worthless and useless- and the two teachers who had smacked him over the head when they thought he either wasn't paying attention or was being 'weird.'

It all shed some...light...on Midoriya's behavior. How he'd seemed so unfazed after almost dying from the Sludge villain- because he'd been threatened by people before. How he so recklessly threw himself into danger- because he had so little regard for himself. How he was *so attached* to Toshinori for showing him basic kindnesses and was so worried about upsetting or disappointing him.

How he seemed so nervous around Bakugou, and Toshinori hadn't recognized it properly.

He felt like an idiot.

"Yes, I am," he said, settling on the couch with a smile. "There's nothing you could *ever* do to change that! Do you even know how remarkably you've been doing? You've managed to pull *four* Quirks from the power of One For All, and even become proficient with them in a few short months! There's a reason you received so many offers for an internship, my boy. If anyone should be apologizing, it...it is I."

"What?" A furrow formed in the boy's brow, looking so comically confused Toshinori wanted to pinch his face. "Why?"

"I had...a talk, with Aizawa, and the principal, too," Toshinori said, knowing he sounded guilty. "They enlightened me to...a lot of things. Including how young Bakugou used to treat you." Midoriya frowned, looking worried, and Toshinori couldn't help but bow his head, feeling too ashamed to look at him. Even after all of that, the kid was still worried about it affecting how Toshinori treated someone who had bullied him.

Sometimes, despite how proud Toshinori was of him and sure he'd chosen the right successor- and sure that Midoriya would go on to do great things- he kind of wished he could just wrap him in a shock blanket (or put him into a bubble, as Aizawa had wryly suggested) to keep him safe.

"I am *so sorry*, my boy. I...was stupidly under the assumption that you two- you two were more like...rivals. I thought you would work it out, be able to work with each other in the future on your own... I never should have put you in that simulation together. I can't imagine how you must have felt, having to fight him- even in just a sparring match- directly after entering Yuuei. I should have stopped the match in its

entirety, really. I'm so sorry I didn't see things for what they were."

Things had changed a lot since Toshinori was a child. There were some things he wasn't quite up to date on- the reason why he'd probably bought too many books on teaching and parenting and methods for dealing with students and anything vaguely related to dealing with children and teenagers to study. But bullying was no stranger to him; he'd gotten pushed around enough in his own middle school to know it was a special type of pain when it felt like no one was on your side, and virtually anything you did would be mocked. He hated that his own boy had gone through it and he hadn't even known.

"Y-you don't have to apologize, A-All Might," Izuku said, obviously sniffling, making Toshinori's brain skip over the brief snag he'd felt when he thought *His own boy?*- because that was true, and he'd gone and gotten much too attached, and history was repeating itself, even if he'd never actually called Nana *Mother*.

"It's all right," he said, because he wasn't sure what else to say, but he had spent his entire life saying that, and he hoped more than ever it was true now because there were some problems he just couldn't punch away. "And- and in regards to training, my boy, please- I know we get some cuts and bruises here and there, but *please*, if it ever becomes uncomfortable for you, or you need to stop, for any reason, just say so-"

Triggered, was the word Aizawa had used.

"I promise I will never think less of you for it. All I want is for you to be happy and safe."

Izuku's tears finally started to leak from his eyes.

On an instinct, he pulled the boy into an embrace and metaphorically released the dam. He cried into Toshinori's jacket, sounding half-broken, and the man just sat there and stroked his hair, for what felt like hours.

He did eventually stop crying, but Toshinori stayed there, because even if they had never even touched for so long, he felt something was different now; he needed to watch more, watch closer, *be there*. He needed to take care of him.

[2 am crush posting]

Ochako: hey izu shouto was asking abt you in class earlier :))))

Ochako: he asked a few times actually. and he kept saying he should go check to make sure you were fine

Izuku: ?? he's my friend

Ochako: i'm just saying :')

Izuku: what are you saying

Momo: I just think it's rather cute. :)

Ochako: it's ok zuzu. i'll show you what i mean.

Izuku: Don't Like That

{Yuuei Hell Space]

rated R for all audiences: LOOK what i got a pic of when i went by the teacher's lounge!

twelve: HOW ADORABLE

Cementoss: That is rather wholesome ;_;

mummyman: don't you all have CLASSES to be teaching right now?

present lunchables: if children can sneak around on their phones without people noticing i think pro heroes can pull it off

AllMight: Please, everyone, stop taking candid photos of young Midoriya and myself

rated R for all audiences: don't you mean your son and you? besides, you know it shows in chat when you save a photo right?

AllMight: i do not have a comment.

Snipe: Oh, hey, Mic, Eraser, how's it going with that kid from Gen Ed?

present lunchables: (*^▽^*) we're ADOPTING him

mummyman: we haven't actually discussed that yet

present lunchables: is there any universe that exists wherein you WOULDN'T adopt him?

mummyman: ...that's beside the point

Overlord: Reminder for our staff meeting at five tonight! We have some updated school guidelines to go over. The topics are mainly recognizing and responding to students' mental health needs, seeing red flags, responding appropriately, etc., but you can bring up any other concerns or PSAs today as well.

mummyman: my psa is that if any of you ever yell at any of my kids i will personally slit your throat at night

Snipe: Jesus Aizawa

present lunchables: give him a break, he does have a weirdly high percentage of kids who were abused in some way in his class. 20% just that we know of

mummyman: 20%? Excuse me? Who are the other two?

present lunchables: okay don't freak out i literally JUST learned this today as in ten minutes ago while i was talking to tokoyami and i swear he has good parents now his bio mom was just a piece of shit

present lunchables: as for the other one he's literally en route to you now to talk about it because he wasn't comfortable disclosing it all to me

mummyman: i'm going to commit multiple counts of murder

victim and quarry

Shouto didn't say anything while Izuku and Fumikage walked with him through the mostly-empty halls after school towards their homeroom. He was hard to read in normal times, but Izuku felt he knew him well enough already to at least tell that he was nervous. He was sweating, something he (quite literally) almost never did because of his Quirk, so he had to be.

They came to a stop in front of their door. Shouto stared at the door handle, where Izuku and Ochako had sneakily placed a few bright pink cat stickers that Aizawa hadn't commented on.

Fumikage tilted his head. "Are you all right, my friend?"

Izuku watched Shouto take in a slow breath. "I'm fine," he said, even though he wasn't moving to enter yet. "It's...fine."

No it's not, Izuku thought, because he was clearly uncomfortable. "It's okay. We're right here."

Shouto stood there for another minute. Finally, he reached out and jerked the door open, looking as though he was trying to regain his usual expressionless persona as he stepped inside.

But he couldn't, not really, and he hesitated when he saw Aizawa in the middle of the aisle just to their left. Despite the man's dry insistence that they would clean up after themselves, he still tended to give the room a once-over when the day was over, Izuku knew, largely in part due to the time when Tsu had forgotten a necklace from her late grandmother at her desk and shown up to school in tears thinking she'd lost it forever.

He looked up when they came in, looking, for some reason, grim, as if he'd been expecting them, and Izuku wondered if he had an inkling of what they had to say or not.

"Uh," Shouto began, exuding a sense of awkwardness. "Sensei, can I...talk to you about...something?"

"Sit down," Aizawa said, gesturing to a chair, and Shouto did. He glanced back at the two by the door, probably on reflex, and Dark Shadow snuck out to give him an encouraging gesture. "What is it, Todoroki?"

Shouto opened his mouth. Then he seemed to freeze, a case of stage fright Izuku was all too familiar with, and he could have sworn the boy paused even his breathing.

Brow furrowing, Aizawa knelt down in front of the desk.

"You can tell me."

"I think...my father is...abusing me," Shouto said, slowly, and judging by the expression on their teacher's face, it was exactly what he'd been expecting.

Shouto talked for longer than Izuku had been expecting.

It seemed that, once he finally got over the hump of telling Aizawa-sensei the truth, details just came flooding out. At some point, he'd asked if Shouto was comfortable coming to the principal's office with him, and Izuku had offered to go with him, but his friend had looked less nervous then, and said he could go home. Shouto largely suspected he was hurting more than he let on, which was true, but nonetheless, Izuku considered other things more important.

Still, after he parted ways with Fumikage at the gate he couldn't help but let himself slump as he walked. He felt like he'd been put through a meat grinder or two. Everything hurt, especially his back, and he'd barely gotten any sleep the night before despite the painkillers he'd been given, which apparently didn't affect Quirk-induced pain. A few more sleepless nights were no doubt in store for him, which didn't give him great optimism about how the week was going to go.

He was only a few damned yards from the Yuuei entrance when he had to stop, convinced he was hallucinating, because there was a face. In the ground.

He stared at it, and it stared back at him, smiling.

...do I have a fever?

"Hey there, little buddy!" the face told him, chipper. "You're that excitable first year, aren't ya?"

...I think I have a fever.

"Uh," he said, and swayed, which made the face stop smiling and start to frown.

"Hey, are you all right? You really don't look that good. I heard about last weekend-"

Izuku gave up and let himself eat it on the concrete. Even after a day of rest, a random face in the ground was really just too much, and passing out for a short rest sounded like a better option than continuing to talk to the hallucination.

...except it wasn't a hallucination, because a pair of thick arms caught him before he gave himself a concussion.

"Whoa, are you okay?! Did I startle you that badly?! Geez, I'm so sorry, I thought it'd be kinda funny!" the voice belonging to the face rambled, belonging to a boy who probably could have passed for being in his twenties if not for his school uniform.

"Are you a hallucination?" Izuku flat out asked him, because the headache pounding in his skull wasn't having any lengthier conversations than he needed to.

At that, the young man looked sheepish. "No, I'm real, honest. My Quirk just allows me to pass through solid objects, like...the ground. Seriously, are you feeling okay? You almost passed out!"

Izuku slowly sat up. He'd just needed to sit down for a minute, he figured. "I'm fine," he griped, even though he rubbed at his tired eyes as he said it. "I'm just...tired."

"...doesn't *seem* like normal being tired," the boy told him in a sing-song voice, and, was he always like this? He seemed very familiar, but Izuku couldn't place him.

He sighed. "All right, it's not normal tired, it's just tired from overusing my Quirk, that's all."

"Ah, right. You healed that guy, right? With the broken spine...?"

The guy had a way of asking leading questions that sounded just teasing enough to be mildly chastising while not sounding like he was making fun of him. Izuku cringed at the reminder. Then he remembered that he was currently sitting on the sidewalk, while he was supposed to be going home, talking with a stranger, and he should probably not be doing that relatively soon. "Uh, was there a reason you popped out of the ground at me...?"

"Oh yeah! Well, I wanted to talk to you. You've been making some

waves, you know!" At Izuku's confused staring, the older boy's grin became sheepish. "And I guess I kind of felt a little guilty...I kind of wanted to apologize."

Izuku's eyebrows drew together. "For...?"

"Well, I guess you were a little loopy when we met. I was the student on duty a few weeks ago outside the mall, remember? With Bubble Girl and Sir Nighteye?"

Just like that, recognition flickered in Izuku's brain. "Oh!" he exclaimed, pointing. "You had a million on your chest!"

"That's me! Togata Mirio, Lemillion!" The older student gave him a blinding smile, holding up one fist, but then it dimmed, as he seemed to remember his purpose in tracking him down in the first place. "But, well...I didn't feel like Lemillion that day. You got hurt, and I was right there, but I couldn't do anything. I *should* have. That's why I wanted to apologize."

"But...you couldn't have possibly-"

"Heroes are supposed to do things when it seems like no one could possibly do anything to help," Mirio told him, both firm and solemn. "Isn't that right? You think so, too, don't you? You are in Yuuei." Izuku had nothing to reply with, unable to deny the rationale he himself shared. "So I'm sorry. I wasn't a hero for you that day."

He sounded so *disappointed*. Izuku couldn't help but feel guilty just sitting there, thinking he might have indirectly caused someone's career crisis by getting shot out in public. Which they still didn't have answers for, which might have made him a little nervous to walk home, but he hadn't mentioned that to anyone.

"It's okay," he said, kind of lamely, in his opinion, but then Mirio lit up again, mood taking a one-eighty.

"Hey, how about I give you a ride home? It's the least I could do! You don't seem in walking shape at all~ I'm not sure if it's a huge amount of selflessness you have, or just a lack of self-preservation! Haha! Maybe both?"

"Th-that's not necessary-"

"Too late!"

"T-Togata-san! I can walk!"

"It's really no trouble at all! Call me Mirio! You can call me anytime if you need something!"

"Mirio-senpai, I swear I can walk-"

The back and forth that was much too close to bickering if not for Mirio's unrelenting cheer continued all the way to Izuku's apartment.

[the bird nest]

raven chick of darkness: shouto, how are things going? are you all right? also, izuku, did you get home okay? you looked a little under the weather when we left. I'm sorry I could not accompany you home this evening.

hummingbird chick: i'm fine. this weird cheerful third year i met a few weeks ago when i got attacked ambushed me and made me let him carry me home :/

raven chick of darkness: only you would mention an act of kindness by someone concerned for you as if it were an inconvenience.

hummingbird chick: it IS an inconvenience! to him!

honorary bird chick: i see keigo changed all our names to include chick again

big bird: it's CUTE!!

big bird: and are you okay? do you need any help?? some food?? an emotional support dog? i can fly over

honorary bird chick: I'm fine

honorary bird chick: i don't know

honorary bird chick: there are social workers at my house. and police. and aizawa came. people have been talking to me since we got here

hummingbird chick: what about your father?

honorary bird chick: i don't know. they haven't let me see him

honorary bird chick: I think Fuyumi is upset

big bird: she probably is, kid. but that's fine. I'm sure your sister can handle this well enough, she's as old as I am

raven chick of darkness: I am not sure that is a point in her favor :/

big bird: OW???

hummingbird chick: fumi...rip...

honorary bird chick: i can hear natsuo yelling. he seems very angry

hummingbird chick: considering you said he hates endeavor i would think he would be

honorary bird chick: i need to leave. they said i have to stay at a facility tonight

big bird: Listen, it's gonna be fine. If you need anything, I can literally be there in like twenty minutes.

hummingbird chick: me too!! and if you want someone to punch your dad without being seen i can do that too!

big bird: you know, sometimes you frighten me

Aizawa was livid.

For whatever reason, the universe had decided to align in such a way to give him the one class that had quite possibly the most issues of any class in the school. And he didn't mean the annoying, reasonable, expected kind of issues that made him want to ram his head into the wall and reconsider teaching, like irrational behavior or immaturity or chronic late homework. He meant the kind of issues that made his blood boil; issues that weren't their fault, issues they *shouldn't even be dealing with,* issues that were a sin to make any children deal with.

They weren't even one semester into school, and every female student in his class had already been sexually harassed at least once. Sure, he'd expelled the brat responsible, but the fact that it had happened was a failure on his and Yuuei's part. Then his class was attacked, by real life villains, when they'd barely had any training at all, and he was surprised more of them weren't traumatized from it. Then he found that one student was a victim of such negligence from former teachers and bullying from his peers that he was terrified to talk to his

teachers and saw everyone as potential threats. And Bakugou, he was being dealt with, and he hadn't had an explosion since Aizawa had spoken to him, but he'd started to see signs in the others too. Fumikage, Asui, Koda- all his students with visible mutations, they were all more than content and happy to just sit around and talk with peers who didn't insult them. He knew Fumikage had apparently been abused at one point. He *knew* Koda could speak, but he was selectively mute, and became a ball of anxiety whenever someone seemed to think it was strange. All Aizawa's former classes- typical children in general- usually bounced off the walls, wanting to go out and have fun, but Class 1A had seemed to create its own little culture that each member was content to stay inside of. Hide inside of, almost. Then there was Kaminari, who'd been told he was stupid for years, and the students in Aizawa's class who typically got the lower grades looked *empathetic* when he told them about his talk with Present Mic. Not sympathetic: like they knew what it was like.

And, of course, there was Hitoshi, who seemed all too blase about how he'd been treated, and Aizawa had overheard him make more than one comment with Midoriya, being sarcastic about the amount of 'battered kids' in their year.

And now all this with Todoroki. Who was scarred all over his body. Who was so traumatized he had never had a friend before Class 1A.

Aizawa was *livid.*

He knew that every student's issues weren't as serious as Todoroki's, or even Midoriya's, but the fact that multiple students had been abused and a disconcertingly large amount of them had faced some kind of bullying or educational neglect was making every protective sense in his body twitch. He knew, that to some extent, he was being overly paranoid, too, but how could he not? He started to wonder- just why were they all so unbothered after USJ? Were they used to it? Had more of them been smacked or hit or had their lives threatened than he thought? Even *Bakugou*, partially, was a victim, and as soon as he'd been put into a healthy environment, where his actions had consequences and he had real friends, he showed improvement, even if he had a long way to go. He'd started *walking home* with Kirishima and Ashido, at times Kaminari and Sero. Why had his class become so tight-knit? Why did they become so attached to each other so quickly? Class 1B wasn't the same. They were friends, but they generally weren't attached at the hip.

"Hah, who hasn't been bullied a little bit?" Kirishima had laughed,

awkwardly, at lunch one day, because the class had elected to stay in the classroom to eat because they were tired after USJ and he'd laughed off part of his middle school experience talking to Kaminari and Ashido, who *agreed* with him.

Were there things he wasn't seeing? How much did he not know?

It was all enough to drive him mad.

There could have been nothing wrong at all, and there could be everything wrong. There was no way for him to know, and that drove him *mad*. They were *children*. It was Aizawa's job to protect them, and if he failed them, he could never forgive himself.

He had to watch. He had to notice everything, anything.

He would watch over all of them, and he went with Todoroki to his house that evening, after Nedzu contacted the police department and social services for a welfare check; he stood in that house, noting how cold it felt, how unlike a home it was, and stared at Endeavor as he angrily spoke to two social workers in his office, the picture of a belligerent man and not a concerned father. He listened to the angry ranting of the living brother Shouto had, who insisted their father was a piece of shit who deserved to be thrown in jail, and watched as their sister sat shakily in the living room as a detective spoke to her and tearfully admitted she didn't think their house was a good place for their youngest sibling.

It was decided that Shouto should spend the night elsewhere, and Aizawa went with him to the welfare facility, glaring at his father as he left. Endeavor, the number two hero. *What a joke.*

Aizawa wouldn't let his student return to that house.

He sent Nemuri a text, asking her to cover his class for him the next morning and rationally explain the situation, because he wouldn't be in and he didn't want his problem children to panic on him.

"The issue now at hand is just who is a suitable guardian for the boy," said the judge in front of him. She didn't look like one, dressed in simple attire, having come over on rush at Nedzu's request, and was seated on a sofa in a staff room working as a makeshift meeting room. Tsukauchi had elected to stand, rather than sit, while his officer took notes and the two women from social services relayed their evaluation of the Todoroki home. "Should the full investigation conclude and custody is taken from Todoroki-san, the mother is not available to

take guardianship. He has two siblings of age, does he not?"

"Yes," said one of the women- Yuki, Aizawa was fairly certain her name was- with a frown. "However, the boy is only nineteen and in university. His sister is older, twenty-two, and a teacher at a school nearby, so I think she could be a suitable guardian, but she seemed very distraught by the entire ordeal. She mentioned that she had hoped their family could heal, and become more normal. I would need to speak to her more to see if she would be suitable."

"Yuuei can maintain guardianship of him for a time, if need be," Aizawa said, voice a little gruff from doing nothing but glare for most of the night. It was morning, now, and his eyes felt dry. "We are already doing that with another student."

"That's not ideal, for me," the judge told him, looking dissatisfied, and he didn't blame her. "A family member would be preferable. But-"

It was then the door opened, and an awkward-looking officer under Tsukauchi's command poked his head in, looking awkward. "What is it?" the detective asked, with a frown, because he knew they wouldn't have been interrupted if it wasn't important.

"Uh, sir," the man said, looking like he'd had a long night. "Something, er, relevant has come up."

"What?"

"There's...a man at the station who came in yesterday. He said that his name was Todoroki Touya."

A slew of disbelieving looks were passed around. "Todoroki Touya is dead," Tsukauchi said, looking and sounding as surprised as they all felt.

The officer shook his head. "We took a blood sample, sir. It's confirmed. During that investigation, a body was never found. It's him."

"By god," Tsukauchi muttered, voice riddled with exasperation with the entire perturbing situation that Aizawa felt too. He slipped his hat off and ran a hand over his hair.

"There's...more, sir."

"Well, spit it out."

"He said that he wants to sue his father." Tsukauchi stared at him, face unreadable. "For custody of his brother."

They sat there in silence in a way that felt particularly unprofessional yet unavoidable. After all, how often did a dead man resurrect himself out of nowhere?

"Well then." The judge finally broke the silence, reaching up to adjust her glasses. "Tell me about him."

(safe because-)

Fukuda's office was much more official-looking than the staff room at the juvenile center. Her degrees lined the wall behind her desk, while bookshelves packed with thick tomes bordered them all on either side; the chairs were made of hard leather that felt entirely uncomfortable, but considering he regularly slept in a sleeping bag on the ground, Aizawa didn't notice or care. Tsukauchi sat beside him, writing in that little notepad of his, and Yuki was standing on the other side of just who they were there to talk to.

Todoroki Touya looked...more like Shouto than Aizawa had been expecting. He had a different hairstyle- Shouto's would probably grow out to be long, while Touya's was spiked- but something about the way he held himself was similar. His back was straight, and he was more confident, but he walked with the air of someone with a lot of repressed anger under their skin.

Aizawa could see why.

"So you see, after the incident with the fire, my client was quite traumatized, considering how young he was," the man's lawyer was saying. "In another circumstance he might have been returned to his home, but due to his memory loss, he ended up becoming homeless for a time in the city due to his confusion. He wandered for a while before a couple visiting the city found him. Because of the grievous injuries he had at the time, they decided to take him in."

Dabi could barely restrain his disdain as he sat there. He just knew his father was in the building somewhere, a perfect target for some arson/murder. Still, he made himself keep quiet and let his lawyer (who was in actuality a villain) do the talking for him. They weren't completely lying: he had wandered into the city after his Quirk went out of control, injured and confused, and pretended he didn't remember anything when that couple found him and took him in for a few years; the best lies had seeds of truth in them, after all.

"The husband worked as a fisherman. Unfortunately, he passed away due to a boating accident, and his wife was already sick, so Todoroki-san never had the chance to question them about his origins when his memory began to come back."

"And the incident that caused this was a concussion, yes?" the judge asked, perusing a fabricated hospital report they'd included in the

stack of paperwork they had.

Yumoto gestured at him. Dabi cleared his throat. "That's correct. A few weeks ago I took a slip on the porch step. Wasn't hurt too bad, but I knocked my head a bit. Doctor said the memory is a weird thing sometimes."

"Well, he would be correct. I've dealt with cases involving memory loss before. It can come back after years, decades even. How much have you remembered since then?"

"It came a bit sporadically. I was confused for a while. It's why I didn't come in immediately. But I remembered most of the important things eventually. I actually wasn't expecting to talk to someone so quickly after yesterday."

"I see. Porch step, you say? So you have a home in the city?"

"Right. Got a house near Yuuei."

Fukuda's eyes roved over a picture of the home Dabi was now in possession of (through vaguely illegal means), looking optimistic. "It appears to be a suitable house. Three bedrooms, within walking distance of Yuuei- closer than the original Todoroki residence."

"The neighborhood is excellent," Yumoto interjected, smiling blandly. "It has a very low crime rate."

"And what do you do for work, Todoroki-san? I imagine it wasn't inexpensive."

"Independent contracting for the company my adoptive father worked for," Dabi said, which felt incredibly weird to have roll off his tongue. Said company was half-legitimate, half-criminal, considering they smuggled more than fish, but Yumoto had multiple friends on the inside who were more than willing to construct a fake job and fake work history. He now had a license to drive small boats, which was completely fake, and he had no idea how to drive a boat, but Yumoto's forgery contact had never been caught in forty years of work. "I get a crate of free fish every week."

He said it with some amount of dullness, because the last time he'd eaten a fish had been six weeks prior when Toga insisted on getting sushi from a shady stand that made them all sick, but Fukuda merely smiled to herself, apparently thinking he was funny. She quickly schooled her expression back into something neutral.

"I know it may appear sudden, Todoroki-san's reappearance, but he has actually thought this through quite thoroughly," Yumoto began again, as smooth as water. "On that next page you'll find a list of healthcare providers scouted from his area. To my knowledge, his brother has been taken care of by in-home nurses, correct? I do not think that is quite appropriate; after all, he's shown to have many injuries that went unreported. We have found a pediatrician, dentist, and therapist within convenient distance from my client's home. I've also included three character references from some of his coworkers."

One of those coworkers being Compress, who'd gleefully written a letter using a company worker's name exalting all his 'good qualities,' just to embarrass him, and the reminder almost made Dabi twitch. Almost.

"Thank you for that," Fukuda said, flipping to another page, face completely unreadable. It set Dabi on edge, a little, because even though he knew that they were all testifying *against* their father, there was always the chance a judge would choose a parent anyway. "I have one last question." She set the folder in her hands down and adjusted her glasses before folding her hands together, looking him in the eye. "Why do you want to take custody of your brother?"

Dabi wasn't stupid. It was obvious why, but if she was worth anything at all, she would ask anyone that question. "My father abused me," he said, bluntly, ignoring the small, quiet sigh that detective with the lie detecting Quirk let out. "And he did the same to my brother. Our other siblings were only spared because they were Quirkless, and thus of no use to him, so he neglected them. No one else is here saying they'll take him, so I will."

Fukuda gave him a polite, neutral smile. "Thank you, Todoroki-san. I have no more questions for you as of now. If you'd please, Yuki-san will direct you to a waiting room. I still need to speak to the other members of your family."

Yumoto stood and gave the woman a bow, hat held to his chest. It felt awkward, and stilted, to stand up and do the same, though he didn't bow as low, but Dabi did anyway, because he wasn't letting himself screw up any part of this.

Aizawa watched Todoroki Touya carefully.

He had to admit, it did seem a little bit weird- the man resurfacing at almost the perfect moment, when they'd already opened a welfare

case against Endeavor. But, sometimes things just happened that way, he thought. He'd seen it in Underground work before. Sometimes, everything went wrong; no one got a happy ending, nothing worked out, and people just got hurt further. But, sometimes, things aligned, things did work out, things did unfold to a victim's benefit.

His primary concern was only whether the man would make a good guardian for his student. So far, he'd seen no evidence to the contrary. He hadn't gone to college, true, but many people didn't; Endeavor hadn't, considering he'd become a hero right out of high school. Civilians were expected to continue their education more often, but Todoroki Touya had found trade work instead, and it was steady enough to form a reliable income. He had a suitable home, was closer to the school, and had apparently already put more thought into his brother's health than their father ever had.

"Touya?! Touya! Oh my god!"

The hallway in the courthouse wasn't extremely packed. Even still, Todoroki Fuyumi had to push past a few people coming out of the elevator as she ran into the hall, searching for her brother. Aizawa had been waiting for the moment the other siblings heard about just what was going on.

The woman's eyes instantly filled with tears when she saw Touya, whose lawyer was edging aside out of respect, as it appeared. Aizawa saw the man soften, losing that hard edge of his, and raise his hand. "Hey, 'yumi."

Fuyumi bolted and sprinted towards him, colliding with him hard enough to knock him back a step. She was sobbing, trying to mutter out incoherent words, and then the other Todoroki brother sprung into the hallway, looking like he'd run all the way up the stairs. He'd probably been too impatient to wait for the elevator.

"Touya?" he asked, looking stricken, half disbelieving and half full of hope. He was taller than his siblings, but he looked entirely too young.

Touya, holding Fuyumi with one arm as she cried into his jacket, merely raised the other because he apparently knew Natsuo was about to pull the same maneuver and nearly tackle him into the floor. He grunted when Natsuo did just that, standing there and letting them both hold onto him for dear life and bawl.

"I'm so sorry," the sister whimpered, utterly torn up, while her brother just trembled, face buried in Touya's shoulder.

The older man sighed. "You guys were always dramatic." But he sounded almost fond, and his hands had drifted to cup the back of Natsuo's neck and wrap around Fuyumi's waist.

Even without being overt about it, he was exhibiting a wider range of emotions than his sorry excuse of a father had since the week had begun.

Aizawa decided he would make his recommendation in the eldest sibling's favor, and he suspected Tsukauchi would do the same.

It was very odd not having Aizawa and Shouto in school.

"Good morning, everyone!" Midnight called with a cheery smile, filling in for their teacher for the second time. Present Mic had come the day before, and now she was there again on Wednesday, and Izuku was starting to get worried about how the Todoroki case was going. "I think for today we'll do some art. How's that sound?"

A quiet murmur of affirmation and a few lackluster nods met her enthusiasm. She tilted her head, planting a hand on her hip, and gave them a searching glance. "All right, what's up? You guys usually aren't so down." And she knew something was up, because they'd all elected to have lunch in their classroom the day before.

The students exchanged hesitant glances. Momo, who usually sat in the front row, was silently elected spokesperson by the girls glancing at her, and bit her lip before speaking. "Um, well...it's not that we don't like having you, Midnight-sensei, it's very fun. But it's just not the same without Aizawa-sensei."

"Yeah," Mina agreed, almost looking close to tears. "We miss him." Slowly, students around her started to nod in agreement. Even Bakugou looked mildly dissatisfied, staring stubbornly out the window.

Tenya's hand shot up. "Aizawa-sensei is always extremely punctual!"

"He helps me with my other classes' homework when I'm having trouble reading and my text to voice is glitching out," Denki added in, looking a bit better when Eijirou gave him a pat to the shoulder.

Kyoka raised her eyes from her desk, looking almost bashful. "And he lets us listen to music on our earbuds as long as we have one out so we can hear him."

"And he never forgets that I'm here," Toru interjected, sounding small. "He always asks me if I can answer questions he knows I'm good at."

"And he can get me down from the ceiling if I get too anxious!" Ochako blurted out, cheeks pink with embarrassment, and judging by the bashful look Izuku had beside her, that was a problem he encountered every so often too.

"He lets me sit by the window," Koda said, so quietly almost everyone stopped to turn and look at him, and he reddened and stared at his desk. Midnight noted the few little songbirds perched on the window, which probably helped with his anxiety.

"He finds things we lose, too," Tsuyu said, looking contemplative as she poked at her chin and looked at the book she had open on her desk. "And lets us read fiction sometimes."

Mezo had been quite quiet, but he looked up from a note he'd been passed from Mashirao and looked thoughtful. "He doesn't mind that my mask isn't technically part of the dress code."

Hitoshi was leaning his folded arms on his desk, looking- or rather, pouting- at the wall to his right. "I just miss him," he muttered.

More of the students nodded in agreement. Then they went back to looking generally disappointed, and even though, Nemuri was well aware it was rather serious (to them, at least, and their feelings) she couldn't contain a mental squeal at how cute it all was. Of course Aizawa, the bastard, who had the highest expulsion record, and generally acted like an asocial bag of potatoes got the class that *adored* him. Was he even aware of how much effort he was putting in past what was required of him? Probably not. Nemuri had always known he had inner dad instincts, that silly man. Just a few days without him, and his kids already missed him so much.

And she knew they weren't saying anything against her, or implying she wouldn't also make accommodations for them, only explaining- in the only way students knew how- why they liked the man so much.

"Okay," she said with a smile. "I understand. But don't worry, because Eraser'll be back on Friday, okay? How about, today, we get the art supplies out and leave some gifts in his desk?"

That idea perked a few of them up. Mina and Kyouka got up to go over to the cabinet in the corner of the room, where a variety of different supplies were, and began passing them out.

Midnight, however, still snuck in a few photos throughout class, and sent them to Eraser's email, rather than his phone, since she knew he was probably dealing with a bunch of legal red tape at the moment. *Your kids miss you :)) :))*

Shouto was nervous.

The judge looked intimidating, professional and put-together, eyeglasses sitting low on her nose as she looked through a few documents on her desk. Only Yuki was there, along with Tsukauchi, and he found himself wishing Aizawa-sensei was there too. Finally, the judge looked up at him and smiled.

"Sorry for the wait, Shouto-kun. I hope this hasn't been too hard on you."

"I'm fine," Shouto said, which was a lie, but he tried not to think about it too much.

"I'm sure you've been wondering a lot about what's going to happen to you. To get you fully up to speed on the situation, I need to inform you that someone else has filed for custody of you." Shouto's brow furrowed. "Do you know your eldest brother, Todoroki Touya?"

Touya?

"I...don't really remember him, but I know of him," he replied, and the judge looked a bit sympathetic.

"I know this may come as a shock, but on Monday, he appeared at a police station to prove that he was legally alive, and not dead. Many years ago, in the incident that caused your family to think he had passed, he did indeed escape, though he was heavily injured and experienced amnesia afterwards. That is why he did not resurface for many years. I assure you that though this may sound strange, it is not actually that rare- this happens quite often to many people displaced after villain attacks, or...disputes with people with extremely strong Quirks. However, over the past month, after an injury to his head, he began to regain his memory of your family. He is the one filing for guardianship over you."

Shouto honestly had no idea what to say. It was a lot to take in at once, and Fukuda looked like she could tell what he was thinking, subtly pushing the small bowl full of candies on her desk forward.

"You do not have to make a statement right now. Rather, I would like to introduce you to him and see how you two interact. So far, he has shown to be a good candidate for guardianship, but I want your feelings to be taken into consideration."

Shouto nodded. Fukuda gave Yuki a look, and the other woman crossed over to the door and opened it, gesturing for someone to walk inside. Shouto twisted in his seat, an uncomfortable thing that was too tall and left his toes scraping the floor, and froze when he saw the man standing in the doorway.

A distant memory flickered in his brain. Someone with red hair, and a kind smile, if subdued, and a blue flame in his palm as he knelt in the yard and Shouto's small hands grasped for it. He'd been too young to pronounce big brother properly.

It felt like someone had dumped a bucket of ice water on him.

He *did* remember. Only...a little bit, but he did.

Touya looked...hesitant. He wasn't moving, letting Shouto decide what to do, but suddenly, all he could focus on was how his eyes looked.

His eyes were blue, just like...

There were bandages peeking out from under the button-up Touya wore. He had on compression gloves, and his face was different, and so was the hair color, but...

Is he...that guy I met?

Was that why he'd seemed so interested in him? Had he been the one who snuck out and given him McDonald's?

"You..." he said, palpably confused, and Touya tensed for a moment, hoping he wouldn't blurt out that he'd already visited him. But, Shouto only lifted a hand to point, brow furrowing. "...Touya...?"

He almost choked from the relief. "Yeah," he rasped. "That's me."

It had felt nice when Izuku hugged him. Izuku told him he should do it more, but Shouto didn't exactly know how to do that, so Izuku had said *just ask for it more.* And asking seemed like some insurmountable, awkward thing to do. So he was embarrassed when his voice came out stilted, and clumsy. "Can I...have a hug?"

Touya hesitated just for a second, something strange and maybe pained flickering across his face, before he rumbled out a "Yeah," and crossed over the chair, kneeling down and wrapping his arms around him.

And it felt strange, because Shouto hardly knew him, but it felt right, too.

And he couldn't help but think his father had never once hugged him in his life.

The judge sat down with him, with only the detective in the room, and looked him in the eye and asked who he wanted to stay with.

Shouto's answer was immediate.

"Touya."

"Who do you think is most well-equipped and suitable to give your younger brother the best quality of care?"

Fuyumi had been crying for a long time. She'd tried to clean herself up before going in to see the judge and social worker, but she knew she still looked a mess, and she was embarrassed. She was embarrassed about a lot of things. She was embarrassed about their family, about how screwed-up it was; she felt like her father had humiliated them, humiliated her, because she'd actually had some inkling of hope that maybe he could change. She was embarrassed that she hadn't known how bad it truly was, and that she hadn't done something sooner, but she didn't know if she would have had the strength to try by herself.

"Our brother," she murmured. "Touya."

"In your opinion, is there a member of your family most suited to ensuring Shouto-kun's quality of care and taking care of his needs and education?"

"Yeah," Natsuo spat. "Touya. Our father is an abusive bastard. If you make him go back there, he's going to get hurt even worse than before. Fuyumi- she *tried*, but she couldn't protect him. She needs- needs a *break*, from being some twisted peacekeeper, from worrying about everyone else, to constantly having a dream of one day having a normal family crushed over and over. She needs to leave, and find

some little place close to her school, and I'm moving into my dorms soon, so-" He paused, visibly trying to calm himself down. "Shouto needs someone like Touya."

"I hope you realize how serious this situation is, Todoroki-san."

"This situation is ridiculous," Endeavor told her with a scowl, making Fukuda subtly note down his heightened level of aggression in her notes. "There is no proof of these accusations."

"Except for the testimony of all four of your children."

"That's *impossible*," Enji said, and for once, she saw a slight bit of vulnerability showing through. "My son. Touya. He- he...he died. I'm not...proud of that. But he died, and whoever this imposter is-"

"I assure you he is not an imposter. We have performed a DNA test, and it matches with the DNA on file at the station who handled his missing persons case. He claims that you abused both him and your youngest son."

Enji's expression morphed. Fukuda had seen it before. Some fathers, when they turned on their families, did so out of only anger and spite. Some thought they were in the right; some were so caught up in their own delusions of grandeur that they neglected and left those who should be precious to them behind. Some of them may have actually felt true regret, but they almost never became a well suited guardian, and the trauma left behind itself posed inherent risk to their victims. Whether or not they could "heal," statistics didn't lie: abused children needed to be removed from a situation that was harming them.

"I trained them," he insisted. "And yes, it was serious training. They wanted to be heroes. Us heroes have to undergo intense training to succeed and rise to the top."

"And this training resulted in your eldest's supposed death?"

Enji became silent. His eyes flitted to the floor, and they held some small element of shame. "I never meant for that to happen. It was an accident. His Quirk went out of control, the park was set ablaze, there was no way of finding him in time."

"Then it seems you are not a qualified trainer," Fukuda said primly, keeping her expression blank as she flipped to a new page. The man in front of her tensed. The fire surrounding his body intensified, just a

little, but she almost hoped he had some sort of explosion, just to make her job easier. "Regardless of whether or not they wanted to become heroes- which there have been doubts cast over- the ages they were at the time were not appropriate to begin such intense training. A Quirk counselor should be utilized to help a child gain suitable control over their Quirk so they do not harm themselves accidentally or those around them, and real training should begin in a certified hero course. Furthermore, your sons sport very serious scars from a multitude of injuries that you never reported or took them to receive medical care for, and you cannot produce any records regarding their medical history. Do you have anything to say in regards to this matter?"

"...No, I do not. My son is my son. I am the one who can help him achieve the path he is on. That is what I have to say."

"Very well, I have no further questions. You can return to your waiting room."

And when Endeavor passed Touya in the hall, freezing when an icy stare caught his gaze, a chill went down his spine, because it was no imposter. It was his son. The one he'd killed.

And he started to feel an inkling of something horrifying deep down.

Murderer.

Aizawa was tired.

He'd used the facility staff room to shower, and awkwardly accepted a hairbrush from the purse of a woman who just gave him an amused look and held it out to him, and had mostly been spending his time on random sofas, nursing cups of terrible coffee. He just, in good conscience, could not leave Shouto alone to deal with all this, even if it meant being out of class for a few days.

He pulled out his phone to flip through his notifications. He'd only really been paying attention to texts, since everyone he knew texted him for anything urgent, and his eyes caught on an email from Nemuri. He pulled up his email to open it and felt his heart seize.

Your kids miss you :)) :))

Hitoshi, Izuku and Ochako had shoved their desks together, doodling on paper on their desks and looking less energetic than usual. Hitoshi

was clearly in a sour mood, leaning on his hand and looking cranky. Izuku had that signature "I'm really worried but I'm trying to hide it but I'm failing spectacularly" expression on his face. Another photo showed the girls, who on the whole looked vaguely downcast as they were setting supplies onto their desks. The third photo was of Mezo, using his multiple arms to hold open a large piece of paper several students were trying to edge in and write on, one of his arms holding a coffee mug they'd drawn on that was too far from the camera to read properly but clearly had his name on part of it. The last photo was just of Dark Shadow, looking pitifully sad as it poked at Aizawa's empty sleeping bag under Fumikage's radar.

He clenched his phone tighter than before. His chest felt warm, almost uncomfortably so, and he reached up to rub at his eyes.

It had only been a few days. It was so silly.

He missed them too.

"Aizawa-san? The judge is ready for her final ruling."

"Coming," he muttered, and stashed his phone into his pocket.

The air in the room was uncomfortable and tense. Natsuo and Fuyumi sat in two chairs against the wall, beside Tsukauchi, and Aizawa stood near the desk, because half the reason he was there wasn't just to give a recommendation as Shouto's homeroom teacher but to get anyone who tried to use a Quirk under control. Fukuda was sitting with steepled hands, Yuki and one of her colleagues sitting on the other side of the room, while Touya sat in one of the chairs with his lawyer behind him and Enji sat in the other. The tension between the two could have been cut with a knife. Aizawa could have sworn he saw the eldest sibling's hand start to smoke at one point, but he'd gotten it under control, and Aizawa only hoped a fire fight between two highly volatile pyro-users didn't break out. Endeavor's face was set in stone, but his hands were gripping the arms of the chair hard enough to crease the leather.

"The investigation over the past few days has brought a lot of concerning information to light," Fukuda began. "Whether or not criminal charges are brought up against any party, or that investigation leads to legal consequences, is not up to me. My only job in this case is to decide the best course of option for the child in question. After consulting with social services, police, and others, I have concluded that Enji-san cannot be considered a suitable guardian

for his son at this time. His brother, however, is a suitable guardian. I am awarding custody to Touya-san."

The tension snapped like a rubber band that had been pushed to its limit. Some of the stress bled from Touya's shoulders, though he still looked on guard, and Natsuo and Fuyumi made audible sounds of relief. She wilted, turning into her brother for support, and he wrapped his arms around her, patting her hair.

Endeavor gritted his teeth. He got up, turned, and stormed out of the room, face an unreadable mask of anger and countless other emotions Aizawa couldn't identify. He slammed the door, making Fukuda purse her lips and make another note on her desk.

"I am going to make some calls, and have this situation regarding your legal status cleared up as soon as possible to push this through," Fukuda told Touya, flipping her book closed. "You should be able to take him home by Sunday. I'm assigning monthly welfare visits for six months, to ensure things are going smoothly, and I will ensure you both receive a no-contact order against your father. If he violates it, please do report it, because it is a violation and will work against him should he try and take custody back from you."

"Thank you," Touya rasped out, and then, because he was still part of a family that had the remarkable ability to be particularly single-track-minded, asked, "Can I see my brother?"

[the bird nest]

honorary bird chick: my brother got custody of me

hummingbird chick: that's so good!!! but wait, isn't he only 19?

honorary bird chick: my other brother. he isn't dead. i guess after he was injured so badly in the accident he was displaced and got amnesia until recently when he got a concussion and when he remembered what father is like he came back to get me

raven chick of darkness: That is a true blessing, my friend. I am happy for you, and for the fact he is alive. What is he like?

honorary bird chick: he seems nice? it's a little bit weird, because i'm pretty sure i've met him before, but i don't want to ask when everyone else is around

big bird: ohhh a mysterious older brother?? :D give us more information!!

honorary bird chick sent an attachment

big bird: wow

honorary bird chick: this is what he looks like

hummingbird chick: you okay keigo?

big bird: yeah i'm totally fine!! why???

raven chick of darkness: I believe Keigo thinks your brother is attractive, Shouto

big bird: oh my GOD shut up i'm not discussing this with fifteen year olds

hummingbird chick: then get friends who aren't fifteen

big bird: ouch :'(

honorary bird chick: i can introduce you to him

big bird: NO ok i do not need a high schooler to be my wingman it's fine

hummingbird chick: have you ever even been on a date?

big bird: ....maybe, maybe not

hummingbird chick: you haven't had you?? does the commission let you do literally anything

big bird: :/ fine i'm a sad single loser

raven chick of darkness: you are not a loser. you've been controlled most of your life by a shady government organization. Isn't Miruko your first friend?

big bird: i mean, i guess

honorary bird chick: I think you and my brother should be friends. I will introduce you

big bird: i'm being bullied again

hummingbird chick: then you'll have two adult friends! you could do actual fun things with them!

raven chick of darkness: I will also be on the lookout for adults who could be Keigo's friend.

big bird: oh my goooooOOOD

The house was...nice.

It was modern, not traditional style. Shouto liked that. He didn't like anything reminding him of home. He sat at the kitchen table, a moving box and a duffel bag full of his belongings on the floor beside him. The house did seem a bit...bare, but he supposed it was expected when only one person was living there.

He heard footsteps as Touya entered the kitchen. He paused, staring at him for a moment, and Shouto just sat there, entirely unsure of what to do.

"You can pick which room you want," the man finally said, after a beat of awkward silence. "You hungry?"

"...Yes," Shouto said after a pause. "Whatever you have is fine."

"I have food," Dabi replied, because Toga had filled his freezer with salmon as a joke, "but we can get takeout."

Shouto looked up at that. Dabi grabbed the phone off the wall and tossed it to him. "Pick whatever you want."

The briefest hesitation crossed his brother's face. "Are you sure?"

"Yeah, I'll eat whatever."

"...all right."

Shouto dialed the number to his favorite noodle shop. They asked him for his card number, and he blinked when his brother held out a credit card under his nose. He took it without saying anything.

When he hung up, he sat there for a moment more.

A sigh wracked the man beside him. He knelt down, beside his chair, and placed a hand on his head, ruffling his hair. Shouto pulled a weird face, unsure of whether he liked that or not. He'd have to *comb* it now.

"You don't have to be afraid to walk around your own house anymore. As long as you don't blow the entire house up I'm really not going to care. Break the TV? Shatter a window? Whatever, shit can be replaced. Just tell me if you feel sick, or get hurt. You can do what you want."

You can do what you want, Shouto thought, mulling over the words. "All right," he said, again. "...can I invite my friends over?"

"Yeah, sure."

"Can I...come down for food if it's too late?"

Dabi's chest felt tight. Normal, regular-ass shit, and his brother was anxious about doing any of it. "You are a teenager. I think you can decide when you're hungry and when you're not. I'm not gonna control what you eat, as long as you're being generally healthy."

Shouto nodded, slowly, as if this was all new, alien information. He stood up, looking hesitant, and glanced at his duffel bag. "I'm going to go...put my things away."

"Go for it."

The boy still appeared unsure as he heaved the box into his arms and then left the kitchen. He walked upstairs, to where the bedrooms were located; one door was open, and it looked generally empty but for the pair of boots sitting in front of the dresser, so he assumed it was his brother's. He kept walking and picked the first room over. It had a bed and a dresser and a desk, and he wondered if Touya would get him a bookshelf if he asked...not that he had many possessions, but he would like to get some books.

He sat down in the middle of the floor and opened the box. It was mostly clothes, along with his school supplies, and a few photos he'd kept under a floorboard. He hadn't looked at them in...years. They were from when his mother was still around.

Only one of them had Touya in it. But it was definitely him- the red hair, the blue eyes, the face. Yet Shouto would have sworn on his life that the weird man who'd shown up to give him McDonald's was *also* Touya. Were...his scars worse than he wanted people to know about? Was he embarrassed? Shouto was embarrassed, sometimes, when people pointed at his scar when they thought he wasn't looking.

He supposed his questions could wait until the morning. He was tired,

incredibly so, and now that he was sitting here, in a new house, on a floor, where his father was nowhere in sight and no one was going to yell at him, he just felt...so utterly exhausted.

He ended up falling asleep halfway through sorting his books and notebooks by school subject. He woke up in bed, when Touya knocked on his door to tell him their food had arrived, and realized that for once, he felt safer than he'd ever felt before.

hitching a ride

The bathroom in Touya's bedroom was large. It was clean, sterile, almost, but the countertop had a slew of bottles and bins on it now that Shouto was pretty sure were makeup. A damp towel hung from the rim of the sink, covered in flesh-colored stains; Touya himself stood in front of the mirror, wiping at the stitched up scars under his eyes.

Shouto stood just behind the door frame, too curious to leave but too nervous to ask, and noticed his brother pause.

"You can come in, you know."

Oh.

Right.

He was standing right in front of a mirror.

Biting his cheek to restrain his embarrassment, Shouto walked inside, feeling how cold the tiles were even through his socks. He came to a stop beside his brother, who didn't stop what he was doing. "Why do you cover those up?" he asked, hoping it wasn't a...well, stupid question. He knew why. Sometimes he wanted to cover his up, but it was just inconvenient, having to mess with makeup every single day and worry about it coming off, and it was still his face. He wanted to be fine with it, no matter what it looked like. But Touya...had even worse scarring than he did. He hoped Touya didn't feel ugly.

Touya shrugged at him. "I don't really give a shit, but they tend to scare people," he replied, bluntly. "Needed to give a good impression to that judge and all."

Shouto turned to stare at the counter. He picked up a bottle of concealer and looked at it, but his eyes weren't reading the words. "...did you bring me McDonald's?"

Touya paused. He glanced down at him, expression blank and unreadable. It didn't seem like he was trying to do it- just that it was his default expression, like people told Shouto his was. "Yeah."

"Why did you sneak in at night?"

Touya glanced at the mirror and sighed. He gave his face one final

wipe and then tossed the towel into the laundry bin far behind them.

"...listen, kid. I'm...involved in some not-so...*legal* stuff. I needed to make sure no one saw me like...how I usually look."

"Legal? Like breaking the law?"

Touya snorted. "Yeah. Breaking the law."

Shouto thought for a few seconds. "Like...stealing?"

"Not often."

"Arson?"

"Actually, yeah, pretty often."

"Vigilantism?"

"I don't think you could call it that."

"...A villain?"

Touya paused again. He was staring into the mirror, at their reflections, and thought for a moment before replying. "Something like that." When Shouto said nothing, he looked down at him. "Do you have a problem with that?"

"I don't know," Shouto said, honestly, because he didn't even know what his brother was doing. "Are you burning babies?"

Touya's brow creased. "...No?"

Shouto shrugged. He picked up a long black pencil-looking thing and looked it over, wondering what it was. He was pretty sure he'd seen Momo, Ochako, and Tsu gathered outside the girls' bathroom once, drawing on their *eyes* with one, which he didn't understand, because that looked like it would hurt.

Touya snorted.

"Doesn't take much to pass your standards, I guess."

"My friend does illegal things sometimes," Shouto retorted, drawing on his hand with the pencil. "And not all heroes are good."

"Oh? Illegal things? What's he done, steal an extra milk box at lunch?"

"He hacked into a police station to get a complaint record another student was involved in to blackmail them into not bullying one of our classmates."

Touya's hand paused where it was packing bottles of concealer into the cabinet. Then he laughed, a dry, crackling sound. "You'll have to introduce me to that one."

Monday morning was one of the kind of so-so, lukewarm, weird-feeling days that Izuku hated.

On the one hand, the pain from healing Tensei- who had insisted Izuku call him Tensei, and had baked him cookies when Tenya brought him over after school- was gone, so he felt much better. On the other, Aizawa-sensei had been out the entire previous week, so the general mood of their class had taken a large dip. Present Mic hadn't even made them do anything during homeroom on Saturday.

(That also made "getting a third year who didn't need to be wasting his time on Izuku to leave him alone" harder, since he'd noticed their class's mood and had apparently taken it upon himself to start popping up out of nowhere to try and cheer him up, too.)

So when he was about two blocks from school, passing a connecting street, and heard two voices jeering in an oh so familiar tone, he wasn't really in the mood for it.

"How's it been going, *kitty*?" a boy of average build with short brown hair grinned, hands on his hips as he stood beside his friend, who sported a blond ponytail and a sharp-looking nose.

"Yeah, copycat, you at the bottom of your class yet? I bet you're failing gym like you did last year!"

"Honestly, you should just drop out already. Yuuei can't have any use for someone who's useless on their own."

"I did *get* into Yuuei, unlike you two," retorted the boy with short blond hair they were mocking, his face steeled into a glare. However, Izuku recognized the telltale tension in his hands as he held onto the strap of his bag. "As if I'd listen to two nobodies."

"You don't even have anything original to offer," the brunet one snorted. "Unless someone else is around to baby you, you can't do anything!"

Neither of them saw Izuku stalking up behind them. The blond boy- Monoma was his name, if Izuku wasn't mistaken- did, however, and he blanched before backing up a step. The other two high schoolers shared a confused glance.

"Excuse me," Izuku said, making them both startle and turn around. The brunet looked him up and down, looking unimpressed before frowning. "What's your Quirks?"

"Excuse me?" the blond snorted.

"I'm sorry, did you not hear me? I'm a student of Yuuei as well, you see. I was interested as to what your Quirks are."

The two boys glanced at each other and squinted before looking back to him. Reluctantly, the brunet began. "Well, I can alter the temperature resistance in my hands so I can grab something that's boiling or freezing."

Izuku looked at the blond. He shifted, suddenly feeling uncomfortable, without knowing why. "I can use my hair as an antennae to send and receive messages?"

He flinched, as if he didn't know why his sentence had ended as a question. The air shifted a few degrees cooler.

Izuku's eyes flashed. "Those are both useful Quirks," he said, making them edge back a few inches. "But also pretty useless in a lot of situations. After all, what's being temperature resistant going to do if you need to move a building off injured civilians? What if the Heroes don't need anyone to exchange information? Both won't help you much in a hand to hand fight, either. So how exactly are those Quirks so special you think you can go around making other people feel like they're less than you?"

A shiver went down the blond's spine. His friend swallowed, loud enough to be heard, and grasped his backpack, looking away when Izuku looked at him. "I...um...well-"

"I'll answer it for you. They aren't. They aren't special. Neither are you. None of us are, really. Like I said, they could be very useful in a lot of situations, but also completely useless in others. Everyone's Quirk is like that. So you don't like Monoma because his Quirk is copying, right? Well, haven't you thought of the fact that Monoma could potentially complete any task, use any Quirk that exists, to do *anything*? He could copy a physical Quirk for a fight, a Quirk like

yours to communicate, a Quirk like yours to protect his hands; an offensive Quirk or defensive Quirk or a Quirk that has any other use. Monoma has the potential to be *the* most useful person on a battlefield because he *can* copy any Quirk, and that makes him *versatile."*

The brunet paled as all the breath left him. "Y-y-you're th-that guy from the news," he said, shakily pointing at him, looking the color of ash. "V-Versatile, that hero student th-that fought the Hero Killer."

"That's me," Izuku told him with a smile. "And you know what, it would have been so convenient to have Monoma there, because then he could have copied my friend's Quirk and taken the injured out while we fought the Hero Killer. Or he could have copied my other friend's Quirk, and helped offensively. What would you guys have done if you were fighting Stain?"

He got a round of stammering and floundering as a response as the two looked rapidly between him and each other as if one of them would come up with a suitable answer.

"That's what I thought," he said, and then let his voice go cold. "You know what I don't like more than anything in the world, even people like Stain? *Bullies.*"

"L-listen, we're real sorry," the blond tried to say.

Izuku glared at them. "It doesn't matter. Leave and don't bother Monoma again."

The two didn't need telling twice. They turned and sprinted down the sidewalk, so fast it was hardly a few moments before they'd rounded the corner and disappeared, and Izuku vaguely heard one of them shriek something as they left. He turned to look at Monoma, wondering if he was all right- he knew encountering any bully, even if they were from a long time ago, was hard- and found him looking shell-shocked, exactly where he'd been standing when Izuku walked up. "Are you all right?" he asked, concerned.

"I...am fine," Monoma finally said, after several seconds, looking at him with wide eyes. "That was...I...don't...you...don't expect-"

"Don't listen to what people like them say," Izuku interrupted, so concentrated on helping any damage caused he completely missed whatever Monoma was trying to say. He reached out and placed a hand on the boy's shoulder, making him flinch. "Your Quirk is useful, and you can be a great Hero with it. People who try and tear you

down like that are just jealous. Besides, I saw you in the Sports Festival, and I think you're really awesome!"

Monoma fell into silence again. His jaw was opening and closing, over and over, as he struggled to find something to say, and his brain appeared to be malfunctioning.

"Oh," Izuku said, suddenly realizing he hadn't even bothered introducing himself. "I'm Midoriya Izuku!"

"Monoma Neito," the boy in front of him choked out, arm limp as Izuku shook his hand.

"Do you want to walk to school together from here? I can deal with them if they come back or if they bother you again. Don't even worry about it!"

For once, Aizawa was relieved to come to school on a Monday morning. It meant no more traveling back and forth between facilities and courthouses all week, talking to legal staff, worrying over where his student was going to live; he was even glad to get a cup of the staff room's terrible coffee.

He turned, and started making his way towards his desk, stopping when he heard giggling. Narrowing his eyes, he turned towards the most likely culprits, and saw Nemuri and Hizashi duck down behind their computers. He turned to All Might. The man looked away, covering his mouth with a handkerchief and clearly pretending to cough to cover up a smile. Snipe was pointedly not looking anywhere near him, instead somewhere out the window in the sky, and Thirteen was entirely too interested in the newspaper.

Idiots, he thought, rounding the corner of his desk and sitting down. He set down his mug, pausing when he saw a stack of paper waiting where forms he needed to fill out were usually deposited.

The hell?

He dragged the stack into his lap and started flipping through. Immediately, he realized- with a sense of dawning horror and affection, horror because his fellow teachers were there- that they were drawings from 1A. Momo, who had knew had taken art classes in middle school, had made a very convincing sketch of him dozing in his sleeping bag behind the podium, of which the other girls had drawn hearts around and left encouraging messages. There was a large

card that the whole class had signed, with variants of *We miss you!* and *Come back soon Aizawa-sensei!* on it. Several of them had tried to draw cats, with varied results, and someone had used cardstock to try and make a card that *was* a cat face.

Goddamnit.

Now that he'd moved the paper, he could see a mug sitting there with *Aizawa sensei Best Teacher Ever!* scrawled onto it in sharpie surrounded by cat faces. Someone had super-glued two pieces of fuzz onto the handle to look like cat ears.

God-damn-it.

"Doin' okay, 'zawa?" Nemuri simpered over their divider, stamping down a snicker.

Aizawa grumbled and swiped at his eyes, letting his hair fall into his face, and turned to glare up at her. "Shut up."

She giggled and disappeared.

Down near the bottom of the group card, in a tiny script, there was an *i love you dad* written in purple ink. He knew it was from Hitoshi, because he used exclusively purple pens, and he knew he'd had to have sat there wondering if he should write it or not forever, because his writing was unsure and nervous.

Aizawa kind of felt like someone was going to squeeze his entire chest cavity into a billion little pieces.

"Where the FUCK have you been, icyhot?" Bakugou growled, which alerted Izuku to the fact that Shouto was coming in through the classroom door, and he perked up immediately.

"That's just his way of saying he was worried!" Mina yelled, which made Bakugou growl.

"Is not!"

"Good morning," Shouto said, beginning to walk down an aisle and grunting when both Ochako and Izuku leapt onto him for a hug.

"Shou! Are you feeling all right? How did it go? How's your brother? Is he nice? Is-"

"I can't answer questions if you ask them so quickly," Shouto said with a furrow in his brow, making Ochako laugh and let him go. The boy just rubbed his neck, looking confused.

"Come, sit down!" Tenya exclaimed, pointing out an empty seat behind him. "Tell us everything!"

"I hope you get to sue him," Tsuyu added in, playing with a fidget cube at her desk behind them.

Hitoshi had been asleep at his desk when the ruckus started. Blearily, he looked up, blinking, and copped a small smile when he saw Shouto. "Sup."

Shouto merely nodded instead of trying to reply verbally to all of them and sat down. Izuku slipped into the chair beside him and beamed. "My brother is very nice," he began, absentmindedly petting Dark Shadow on the head when it snaked over to greet him. "Our house is too. I have my own room. And he lets me order takeout." Even from a few rows away, Izuku could hear Fumikage chuckle. "It's...nice not living with my father anymore."

"I would guess that it is." Tenya's expression fell, looking more disappointed in himself than anything. "I'm so truly sorry I did not notice this going on sooner."

"It's not anyone else's fault."

"But you're away now, and that's the part that matters," Momo said, smiling as she reached back to pat them both on the shoulder. "I took notes for you all week in every class! Don't worry, I can catch you up completely!"

"That's nice. Thank you. My...brother said I can invite friends over, if...you guys want to come today."

"Yes! That is a wonderful idea!"

The door slid open again. Immediately, they all whipped around, and the class let out a volley of cheers when a familiar exhausted, irritated-looking man walked through.

"Sensei!"

"Aizawa-sensei!"

"Aizawa-sensei, we're so glad you're back!"

"Sensei did you miss us?"

"Sensei I missed you so much!"

"Aizawa-sensei-!"

The man jerked to an awkward stop in front of the podium and opened his mouth. Then he closed it, not even chastising them, because he was overwhelmed by just how happy they were to see them. He knew they'd missed him, but they were practically jumping out of their seats (save for Bakugou, but even *he* was glancing over at him in between staring out the window), and they were all yelling over each other trying to tell him how much they were happy to have him back.

Finally, he took one hand from his pocket and held it up. Miraculously, they quieted down, and even though some of them were standing or half-standing- which he should really chastise them for- they looked so *happy*, smiling, much better than how they'd looked in Nemuri's photos- so Aizawa didn't have the heart to.

"I missed you all too," he said, throwing just enough dryness into his voice he didn't sound too emotional. "Now how about you all sit down and we can begin the lesson."

It was almost a little creepy how happy they all looked to sit down and do some schoolwork. All of them, even the ones who didn't like to work, scrambled for their notebooks and pens and homework notes, and Aizawa let his eyes drift to Hitoshi. He was keeping his head ducked down, and had his book up in front of his nose, almost.

Fuck it.

"Hold on." Everyone froze, looking at him in confusion. "We aren't doing any formal work. More than one of you have had some difficult experiences recently, so we're taking it easy today." Instead of looking overjoyed at the prospect of no schoolwork, they just looked curious as to what he had to say. "Move the desks out of the way for now. Form groups of five. Who wants to volunteer to get some supplies from the closet?"

Nineteen hands instantly shot up. Bakugou didn't, but he was staring at the wall, which meant he was listening, which was his own way of getting ready to jump up if something needed done.

"Midoriya, Yaoyorozu. You two come help me."

This homeroom was...interesting.

Izuku immediately latched onto Shouto for his group. The boy didn't seem to mind, in fact, he leaned into his touch, which was kind of odd- in a good way- and Dark Shadow wrapped around them right after. Ochako landed on them with a giggle after taking a flying start, and Hitoshi wandered up behind them to finish their group off.

They sat on a blanket in one corner of the room, near the closet where they kept more supplies, while the other four groups sat in the other four corners. Bakugou, Mina, Kirishima, Kaminari, and Sero had formed one, which Izuku expected; Momo, Kyouka, Toru, Tsuyu, and Tenya formed the last, and it was a bit funny to watch him ranting about something and chopping the air while all the girls giggled at him. The last group was Koda, Mashirao, Mezo, Sato, and Aoyama. They were all leaning in while Aoyama discussed *something* about the rare cheese he'd brought to share.

Hitoshi jumped when a hand landed on his head. But it was only Aizawa, who'd knelt down beside him, and was now ruffling his hair. The boy averted his eyes, obviously embarrassed, probably because he'd called the man dad in their card, which Izuku had spent ten minutes talking him up to.

"Homeroom is going to be a little different from now on. I want you all to know that if something is bothering you, no matter how small or inconsequential you think it may be, you can come to me about it. If you need someone to walk you home from somewhere, I can come. If you think someone is following you in a store, you can call me. If someone tries to bully you, you can come tell me. If anyone ever hurts you, in any way, no matter the context, I want you to tell me immediately. If there are things you'd like to talk about without being in front of the entire class, you can do that here. This room and these four walls are yours. That means that it's safe."

"...so we can talk about anything?" Ochako asked, sounding a little hesitant, fiddling with her charm bracelet.

"Anything."

Shouto's voice came out quieter than hers, just a bit raspier. "Is it all right if I don't talk?"

"Yes."

They were all silent for a moment. Then Dark Shadow popped up from behind Fumikage's shoulder. "Someone called Fumikage a chicken brain and it really hurt our feelings."

"What? That's not fair!" Ochako cried, unintentionally starting a ten minute therapy session about how handsome and brooding Fumikage's hero persona was.

Aizawa made his way around the room eventually. There was an entire stack of instructions and supplies Hizashi had gotten off the internet that were supposedly for use in the classroom to counteract the effects of what he suspected his whole class had undergone- that was, varieties of educational neglect, trauma, bullying, and abuse- including coloring books (which he had doubted, but Koda had looked particularly at peace while he was drawing a set of birds), games they could play, and techniques like the one he'd tried first, breaking them into smaller groups so they felt more comfortable talking.

And he tried to watch every one of them individually- watch for any signs they were upset, or hiding something that pained them, or unhappy- but as far as he could tell, it was just a quiet Monday morning.

He hoped that it was actually something he could be happy about.

They seemed to like the drawing very well, even if they all weren't the best technically. He had set out an entire box of every conceivable marker color and about forty-five minutes into class Momo, Kyouka and Sero had gathered around the whiteboard on the back wall to start a surprisingly well thought-out drawing of a phoenix. Everyone, eventually, had drawn something, even if Kirishima and Kaminari had to drag Bakugou to participate.

They were relaxed. Happy.

He put in an order after class ended for sketchbooks for the storage closet, so they wouldn't have to use just loose copy paper.

Kendo jumped when someone slammed a lunch tray onto their table. That someone turned out to be Monoma, who looked particularly smug about something, and she sighed. "What is it today?"

Tetsutetsu looked up, a sandwich half in his mouth. She could see the tomatoes falling out of it. She wrinkled her nose.

"I made friends with that Midoriya boy from Class 1A," Monoma said, still smug, and several people choked on their food. Kendo's eyes widened.

"You? You made friends with him? Really? *You?*"

"That's right," he said, smiling like he'd won a prize. "The most dangerous person in school, and he's friends with *me*." Then looked to the left, catching sight of something. "Look at that! He wants me to come over. Tootles!"

"Don't ever say tootles again," Kendo threatened, but he was already trotting off, and she patted Tetsutetsu on the back with a grimace.

"Hi, Neito!" Izuku greeted with an oblivious smile, scooting over and making room for the blond to sit down. He looked like the cat that had caught the canary as he did, beaming, and the other members of 1A gave them weary, confused glances.

"Hello there, Izuku," Neito replied, oddly chipper, before zeroing in on who sat beside the greenette. "And Shinsou from General Studies! Hello!"

Hitoshi let out an audible groan, letting his forehead smack into the table. "Really? This guy? Izuku, why?"

"I heard Shinsou made it into the hero course, which was obvious, considering how skilled he is, it was just a disappointment he got into class 1A instead of 1B," Neito continued, like he hadn't even heard him, still grinning. "Can I call you Hitoshi now?"

"No."

"Amazing! Thank you! You know, I would say you two are the best in 1A. How has it been Hitoshi? I hope 1A doesn't have too big a head for you."

"I'd like to die right about now."

"That's so unfortunate. It's that bad?"

"Why would the class have one head?" Izuku asked, oblivious. "There's twenty of us." Neito let out a rattling laugh that made Sero and

Kirishima groan.

"Hey, you guys do after school training, right? Why don't I join in?"

"No," said Hitoshi.

"Sure!" Izuku exclaimed, smiling. Hitoshi shot him a glare.

"Well, um, welcome," Ochako said, finally breaking the stalemate of Neito steamrolling through the conversation only talking to the other two. She tried to smile. "I don't think we've spoken before, but I thought you were pretty impressive in the Festival!"

Neito glanced over at her. "Oh, you're the gravity girl. You gave Bakugou a pretty good beating, huh? That's a favor for us all." He smiled, much less manically, and poked his fork into a piece of chicken. "Say, maybe I could try your Quirk out some time. It'd be funny to float Vlad King away while he's trying to teach and him have no idea what's going on!"

"I don't think that's a good idea," Hitoshi groaned, rolling his eyes as he turned his head towards them. "Are you really friends with Izuku all of a sudden?"

"Of course I am! You're not even as scary as everyone says you are!"

"Yeah! Wait, people think I'm scary?"

the acme

"I swear, everyone thinks you're scary!"

"Neito, that's just silly! People were probably just impressed by the Festival..."

"No, I'm serious. They know you can do whatever you want."

"What? No I can't!"

"Yes you can! You can get someone expelled, dig up someone's dirt, contact their parents, find their work studies..."

"Honestly, you're being ridiculous. I'm not intimidating at all!"

That was how Izuku and Neito's nearly thirty-minute long conversation had gone that day, mostly due to Izuku's lingering self esteem issues. He just couldn't imagine someone would be scared of *him*. After all, he was always the person who got pushed around in junior high, made fun of, called names...honestly, he just helped other people out, that was all.

He also just possessed the unique ability to not see what was right in front of his nose.

More than one female student had hunted him down and asked him to 'amicably ask' a guy to stop bothering them, which usually involved blackmail or just talking to them. Male students came to him, too, when they had issues with other students mistreating them. Izuku thought talking solved most problems before anything like violence, after all, so many people stopped after he talked to them! All Izuku did, in his opinion, was do favors for people. There wasn't anything wrong with exchanging favors!

He just had about eighty of them stored up for a rainy day.

Getting called to the principal's office usually wasn't a good thing, but Izuku wasn't sure if this was a good thing or not.

"Sit down, Midoriya-kun!" Nedzu exclaimed, sounding cheerful as he gestured to the sofa. Izuku followed his instructions, setting his backpack down, as he didn't want to appear rude, but he was confused; a chess board and two cups of tea sat on the table between

them. "I thought we should have a conversation."

"A-am I in trouble, sir?"

"Oh, of course not! It's the opposite, actually," Nedzu said with a smile that would have seemed unnerving to most other people. "You see, I've heard a lot about you so far this semester. You seem rather interesting. Would you like to play some chess with me? And maybe some shogi after! Here, have some tea."

"Um, thank you. I like tea."

Izuku really had no idea why Nedzu invited him to play games and drink tea every other afternoon, but he certainly didn't mind.

"I'm home," Shouto called out when he let them into his house, waiting for them while they took their shoes off on the mat. It was, indeed, a very nice house, and Tenya said as much as he stacked his shoes neatly on the rack.

Ochako nearly tripped getting hers off. She was so excited to be there, Momo had to reach out a hand to steady her. Fumikage chuckled at them.

Shouto led them past the entryway and into a living space. There was a long sofa, two chairs, and a coffee table in front of a television, as well as a calendar hanging on the wall, and not much else there. Izuku didn't have a problem with it, though; he liked neatness.

"You can sit anywhere," Shouto said, subtly moving one hand behind the other and rubbing a thumb across his wrist. Izuku noticed that he did it when he was nervous. He reached out and gave his friend's elbow a soft pat, making him jump a bit and then give him a mildly grateful look.

Tenya sat primly on one of the chairs. Ochako and Momo said down on the sofa together, while Fumikage took the other chair, leaving the other half of the couch for Izuku and Shouto. They were still standing when Shouto's brother walked through the doorway from the hall.

Izuku looked up and paused.

...huh.

On the surface, he supposed there wasn't anything weird about

Shouto's brother. He looked normal enough, he looked related to Shouto, he looked...

Oh, he realized, slipping on a smile. It was just the slight sheen of makeup on the man's face. He recognized it- he'd sat in the bathroom and watched his mother do her makeup before work for years.

"Hey, kid," the man said, appearing rather relaxed and laid-back. "These your friends?"

"Yes," Shouto replied, relaxing marginally. "This is Touya. That's Tenya, and Momo and Ochako, Fumikage, and this is Izuku."

They each raised their hands in succession, only a little awkwardly. Touya inclined his head at them. "Do whatever you want," he said, waving lazily back as he headed for the kitchen. "I'll order food if you want."

"Thank you," said Shouto, before he sat down.

Izuku went to sit as well. Abruptly, Ochako scooted harshly across the sofa so he had to sit between her and Shouto rather than her and Momo. He gave her a confused look, but she just smiled innocently back. Shouto appeared even more relaxed once he sat down.

Tenya reached down to his backpack and unzipped it, pulling out his math notebook. "Well, if everyone is ready, would you like to lead us through this week's homework, Momo?"

"My pleasure," the girl replied, with a sparkling, polite smile, taking out her own supplies. "Before we started, however, I did have a question, Izuku."

His head shot up in interest whilst he took a variety of pink pens and highlighters from his pencil box. "Oh?"

"Well, I had heard someone had asked you to talk to Machida-san. The third year?" She bit her lip, looking a bit uncomfortable, and Fumikage arched a curious eyebrow at her. "I had heard he's been talking to a lot of first year girls, you see."

"Oh! Yeah," Izuku responded, feeling sheepish. He absentmindedly drew a tiny string of pink hearts on his paper while he thought about the incident she was mentioning. "He's gonna stop. I talked to him."

A smile bloomed on her face. "Oh, excellent! That's a relief." She

pressed her hands together and sighed. "I hadn't talked to him, but he glanced at me in the hall one day, so I'd gotten nervous he would."

"Don't worry, he won't talk to any girls like he was again. I recorded him one day and sent it to his mother."

A few of them let out quiet chuckles. "That does remind me," Tenya exclaimed, looking up with interest from his page. "And of the request about that second year in General Studies?"

"Which one?"

Ochako rolled her eyes. "The fact you have to ask which one."

Tenya smiled. "The one who was spreading misinformation about Quirkless individuals."

"Oh, I talked to him too. He won't do it again."

"Did he cry too?" Shouto asked, because he often listened to Izuku talk about people he talked to, and he was always interested in their reactions. A lot of them cried, for some reason, which neither of them understood.

"Yeah, he did," Izuku told him, both looking equally perturbed. "I dunno why. Lots of people cry after I talk to them."

"I can hardly imagine why; you're so polite," Tenya said, thoughtful, before shrugging and pulling up his notebook. "But no matter. What's important now is math!"

At some point that afternoon, when Izuku walked into the kitchen to get a glass of water, he ran into Shouto's brother. The man was coming in from the screen door that led to the outside, apparently having just taken the trash out, and Izuku paused for an awkward second before smiling. "By the way, uh, Touya-san, I hope this isn't out of line, but if you prefer not to, you don't have to wear that around us!"

A curious eyebrow cocked on the man's face. "Wear what?" he drawled, not particularly offended or aggressive but somehow...reserved.

Smile growing sheepish, Izuku pointed at his own face. "The makeup," he said, making Touya's eyebrows shoot up in surprise. "No one in our class is superficial. Shouto worried about that too, a little while ago."

Touya didn't say anything, just stared at him, so he shuffled his water to the other hand and smiled again. "Um, thanks for having us over!"

He darted out of the kitchen.

Dabi stood there squinting after him, wondering how the hell the kid's eyesight was so good he'd noticed the near perfect makeup job Toga had taught him how to do.

...he also apparently made people cry on the regular, something all of his little friends thought was completely normal, so maybe Shigaraki really had a potential foe here.

He decided he would keep up his end of his deal with Tomura that weekend.

"It's so nice of your brother to take us out," Ochako said with a bright grin, swinging her purse side to side as they walked through the mall. "Is there anything you want to play first, Shouto?"

Shouto looked around the arcade and shrugged. Touya was leaning on the counter near the entrance, saying something or other to the attendant, so they'd been left mostly to their own devices. "That one, maybe," he said, without much real conviction, as he gestured at a tabletop for two.

"We'll do that one then! Izuku can enjoy something single player for a round. Let's go," Ochako said, grasping his hand and then taking off, and giving Izuku a fanged grin when he looked mildly disappointed. Izuku just stared after her, completely uncomprehending, watching Shouto try to keep up while she skipped. It was an awkward stride to match and left him speed-walking through the store.

He shrugged to himself and looked around. He headed down an aisle of machine games and took a seat, not particularly caring what he played. He enjoyed games in general, as long as they weren't frustratingly simple, like those phone games that consisted of nothing but bouncing a ball up and down to avoid obstacles.

He'd only been playing for about a minute or two- it was some kind of card game, he didn't know the name- when something popped up on the screen. *Register #5 requesting match.*

To his surprise, someone had sat down to his left without him noticing. He supposed he'd been focused on the game so much,

learning the rules as he went along, that he hadn't been paying attention. He hit the accept button to not be rude. There was no one else in the aisle, so it wasn't like there was anyone else to play with.

The screen changed as it dealt him new cards.

"So, you feeling all tough after beating the Hero Killer?"

Izuku froze.

He recognized that voice.

Slowly, he turned his head to the side, where bluish-grey hair was peeking out from under his opponent's hoodie. The man turned to face him, and his stomach dropped when he realized it was Shigaraki Tomura.

...in a hoodie and ratty jeans, in a mall arcade.

...*okay*...

"Not really," he found his mouth saying. He remembered USJ, remembered how scared he'd felt, but he *had* gotten so much more experience since then, and something about the man just wasn't as scary. Not here, not now, for some reason. "It's not like I took him down by myself."

"Oh?" Looking vaguely manic, Shigaraki tilted his head, looking almost...*fascinated.* It felt like being under a microscope; kind of creepy, really. "The power of friendship beat him?"

"It does help when you have an actual party. That's why your attack failed, isn't it?"

Oh my god, why am I talking to him, Izuku thought, but his body was absolutely frozen and his fingers for some reason were just playing the game like everything was normal.

"Well, I've gained a party since then," Shigaraki told him, and Izuku wondered if he had a purpose to it or not or if he was being irresponsible again. Telling a Hero student he had gained allies wasn't exactly smart, after all- wouldn't Izuku just blab to his teachers? Then again, that could be what he wanted.

"Doesn't matter if you can't play the game well."

That was *so much more mouthy* than he should have been, but Izuku

couldn't resist. Even if it made Shigaraki's eyes light up in anger, he couldn't help but challenge him. After all...

If he was trying to be an apex predator, he was going to have to try harder.

The screens dimmed as he won the round.

Shigaraki's eyes flickered to it, and he scowled, for just a moment.

"Didn't you say you want to expose hero society?" Izuku prodded, thinking of Keigo. Thinking of the Hero Commission. "You have to use your pieces on the board better. You had the wrong targets. You were too impatient."

"Oh, really?" Shigaraki's eyes shone with *something*, be it insanity or interest, as he stared him down. "And what would you have done?"

Izuku shrugged. "I probably would have used the school access you had when you got in to access the school's secure channel to the HPSC main office and hack their files, and then went after each offending member I thought deserved it." And that was true, but, well. He wouldn't do that. But then again, that was actually a good idea...

Shigaraki paused, looking surprised.

Then his eyes narrowed. He looked at Izuku like he was a puzzle, some kind of enigma, and Izuku didn't know what he'd done to gain such curiosity from the villain, but he supposed it was better him than one of his classmates. "I don't get you, brat," he said, turning off his game and tossing the controller into the tray in front of him. "What *are* you?"

"What?"

Shigaraki crossed his arms, leaning closer. Izuku didn't move. "What is it about you?" he asked, breath coming out harshly. "Why are you the way you are? Why are you so...*infuriating?* Why are you so..." *What I need to be,* went unsaid, unbeknownst to either of them.

"I think," Izuku said, slowly, "that you're looking at things the wrong way."

Shigaraki stared at him, uncomprehending.

"I learned a long, long time ago that there's always, *always* going to be

someone who tries to hurt you," Izuku said, feeling something steel within him as he recalled just how he'd learned those things. "Someone who can get away with things, who won't get in trouble. People who like to prey on others for no reason. And that a lot of the time they wear the faces of nice people, friendly people, good people. *Heroic* people. In any group of people, there's someone at the top. Every food chain has its apex predator. You have to find them before they find you. That's the only way to survive. And to play the game right, you can't just *play* the game." He dropped his controller into the tray. "You have to set the rules in the first place. You control the game, you don't play it. You only pretend to play it for other people. Or else the game will play you."

His eyes landed on something beyond Shigaraki's shoulder. In that instant, his mind shifted. He didn't forget Shigaraki was there, but someone else was who was, to him, a bigger threat. Despite Shigaraki's villain status, after all, he was still that: a villain. He wasn't going to risk hurting a minor in a public space. He spent his time holed up elsewhere, and it was only the second time Izuku had met him.

But the person he saw across the arcade was a first year in the Support Studies course he needed to talk to, someone who was actively doing things Izuku needed to stop.

"Sorry," he said, completely missing the irony of apologizing to the villain. "I have to go talk to someone for a minute."

He got up and whirled off, not even giving Shigaraki a chance to stop him, because his focus was completely shifted.

"Kinjo-san."

At the back of the arcade, sitting at a racing game in between two other second years who were all laughing at something, sat a boy with orange hair and sharp incisors that showed as he cackled. He straightened when Izuku spoke, whipping around so fast he almost fell off the spinning chair he sat on, and the color fled from his face.

Izuku smiled.

The two boys on either side of Kinjo blanched and leaned away from him. "M-Midoriya-san," one of them greeted, averting his eyes.

"Good afternoon," Izuku said, thinking to himself that at least the guy's friends were polite. "I need to talk to you about the other day, Kinjo-

san."

"I-I don't know what you mean-" Kinjo started, looking mildly sick.

"Ah, but I think you do. You see, some of the Support students have been telling me you're very belligerent in the studio when Power Loader isn't around. Ordering people around, calling them stupid if they get something wrong, making fun of someone who got shocked the other day...you see, I have a close friend who's in Support, Hatsume Mei, you may know her?" Kinjo's face twisted up in a mixture of revulsion and fear. Mei had nearly brained him with a wrench one day when he'd insulted her one too many times. "You see, this behavior just isn't becoming of a future Hero. Are you planning on becoming a support Hero like *this*, Kinjo-san?"

"...N-no," the boy stammered, looking anywhere but his face.

"Then I find it confusing as to why you act that way," Izuku replied, face becoming neutral. Unintentionally, he found himself leaning closer, wondering if there was something on his face that Kinjo didn't want to look at. "I don't appreciate people bullying my friends, Kinjo-san. Do you understand that?"

"Y-yeah."

Izuku slipped his phone out of his pocket. He flipped it around, showing a short clip from the Support studio security camera. Kinjo looked even paler. "H-how'd you get that?"

"I'll be telling Power Loader to check the cameras tomorrow," Izuku said with a shrug, flipping to his photos. "You'll probably just get detention, but I'm sure if he catches you *again* the punishment will be much more severe. And if he heard about this-"

Kinjo looked absolutely like he was going to vomit when he saw what was on Izuku's phone. It was a photo of him sitting on a motorbike, holding an open beer, and flipping off a couple and child in the park he and someone else on a bike were apparently going through.

"W-w-where did you even find th-that?" he stammered. "I-I never posted it anywhere!"

"Underage drinking, illegal driving, and being inappropriate in front of a child. Very bad behavior for a Hero, wouldn't you say?" Izuku hated bullies. He hated them *so much*. He would make sure every bully he ran across knew the consequences of their actions and changed, or

else. "I thought I might bring it up next time I visit Principal Nedzu for our teatime."

"Teatime?" Kinjo whispered.

"Oh, yes, we have tea together up in his office three times a week. We play chess sometimes."

There was a long, prolonged silence. Kinjo's two friends looked terrified, glancing back and forth between them like it was a one-sided boxing match that Izuku was winning. "...l-look, I-I'll do whatever you w-want," Kinjo finally said, a few tears gathering in his eyes. "J-just don't get me expelled like you did to Mineta, please?"

"All I want is for you to start behaving appropriately," Izuku shrugged, putting his phone away. "And I won't have a problem. Can you do that?"

"Yes, I pr-promise!"

"Good!" He smiled, brightly, satisfied with the outcome, and they all cringed. "I also recommend you start attending counseling for whatever anger or confidence issues that are causing you to bully people. I *very* much *recommend* it."

"I-I understand."

"Perfect. Well, thank you for talking with me. I'll be off."

Izuku turned around and saw an empty aisle waiting for him. His mind shifted back into a relatively normal mode, and he startled, realizing that Shigaraki was gone.

...*I probably should have yelled for help or something.*

Well, as long as he hadn't hurt anyone?

Shigaraki, however, hadn't gone anywhere; he was in a different aisle, close enough to hear them, and was staring at where they stood from between two free to play slot machines, eyes hooded. That conversation- that little exchange- he figured he understood more now. That green brat...he was controlling his own game. He was controlling players. He was being smart, calculating...he would have made...*such a good villain.*

He twirled around the corner just as Izuku came around it.

The boy stopped, startled, and looked up at him with wide eyes that held no true fear. It was like he said- why would an apex predator fear anything? He wasn't afraid of Tomura, either because he thought he was *beneath* him...or because he saw him as an equal in some way.

He wondered which kind of arrogance the boy had.

"You would be a good villain, you know," he said, in a low tone, because he knew it would bother the kid, but instead, he got a quirked eyebrow in return.

"Maybe," Izuku returned slowly. "I don't believe the world is made up of just heroes and villains." Shigaraki's eyes narrowed to slits. "I'm going to become a Hero, and change the things wrong with Hero society as one."

"Well then, I guess I'll be your opponent, won't I? What will you do if I'm the one controlling the game?"

And somehow, Izuku found a smile crawling onto his face.

When he wasn't trying to kill anyone, something about the guy was almost endearing.

"Who's to say which of us will be?" he retorted, an undercurrent of *who's to say we'll be on opposite sides?* rolling through his words. He leaned closer too, running on a long surge of confidence probably due to adrenaline; he had a feeling he would be sitting on the floor of his bedroom that night hyperventilating that he'd talked back to a villain this much.

But he just couldn't resist.

"I guess we'll have to see," he said, and then reached up and had the audacity to poke the man in the forehead. "Tag. You're it."

Then he did dart away in earnest, hauling ass across the arcade to find Shouto and Ochako, and left Shigaraki standing there, eyes wide.

kind of friends (kind of prey)

He probably should have been reporting the random kidnapping incidents.

Truly, however, they just weren't much more annoying than a few flies buzzing around his head. He severely doubted they were serious attempts: they were just Shigaraki's way of annoying him. Every so often when he was walking home, a villain (or villains) would pop up and try to nab him, and every time he'd usually just kick them in the head and tell them to tell Shigaraki "Tag." At some point a blonde girl appeared and tried to stab him, which she apparently thought was a game, and he spent twenty minutes dodging while she tired herself out and giggled the entire time, then left of her own volition with an ominous "You are as fun as Shiggy said!"

At some point, he began learning them by name. Twice was a man who often showed up and didn't really put a lot of effort into trying to kidnap him. Probably because the first time he'd seen Izuku, he'd been stripping down a bully (which were becoming scarce at Yuuei in general) and had made the kid cry. He usually got set off by something Izuku said that he found funny and they ended up getting cinnabuns from a convenient store instead of fighting. Mr. Compress had nearly got him a few times, but Izuku was very good at avoiding his Quirk, and he said that Izuku had an impressive amount of showmanship for someone who went to Yuuei. He kept urging Izuku to be more confident and incorporate more tricks into his fighting. Kurogiri showed up once not to try and kidnap him, but just to deliver an angrily drawn, very complicated game of tic-tac-toe that Izuku and Shigaraki were competing over with a sigh, acting like a tired father. Then there was Magne, who told him he could call her Big Sis, who apparently thought he was hilarious because of the 'stories' Shigaraki was telling (Izuku didn't want to know). Spinner was probably the most aggressive in his attempts, but the fact that Izuku kept countering that ridiculously oversized sword of his with nothing but a knife eventually impressed him enough they sat down and Izuku brought up the dark web to show him other things he could use for sale.

One time, a scarred man with black hair showed up, looking very much like he didn't want to be there, wearing a tired grimace.

"Oh, hi, Touya," Izuku said, cheerfully, as he stood in the alley he cut

through to get to his house faster, where villains always attacked him, and he kept going through. He had a bag under one arm full of cinnabuns because he'd figured it would have been Twice today, judging by the pattern. "I didn't know you were in the League of Villains. Do you want a cinnabun?"

Touya stared down at him, looking incredulous, and his jaw popped open. "What the fuck?"

Izuku's brow furrowed. "Huh?"

"How the fuck did you know it was me?"

"..." Izuku said nothing for a moment. Did Shouto's brother think he was blind or something? "I already knew you had facial scarring," he said, obviously confused. "And the only other thing different is your hair color. Otherwise, you have the exact same eye color, facial structure and build. How stupid do you think I am?" He almost felt kind of offended.

Touya stared down at him, hands in his pockets, looking like he wanted to leave and go take a smoke somewhere before he reached up to pinch the bridge of his nose and closed his eyes before muttering something about giving up before he tried.

Izuku reached into his bag and took out a box of cinnabuns, holding it out. "Here, you can take some home for Shou! Also, can you tell Shigaraki that if he wanted to surprise me with a new player it probably shouldn't be someone with a Quirk so similar to my best friend's? I spar with him all the time, I would have a million ways to beat you-"

He accidentally fell into a rant about all the disadvantages Dabi had, including his overheating (which Izuku had guessed all on his own, because where else would those burns have come from?), his inferior stamina, their enclosed environment, Izuku's ability to fly and create a wind vacuum and suck the air out of the alley, and how much more effective it would have been if he'd sent Magne to distract him while Dabi focused on long-range fire from a rooftop and Toga engaged him by hand. Dabi just stared at him the entire time, holding a box of cinnabuns, looking disturbed.

"I see," was all Shigaraki muttered when Dabi returned to the base, hiding one box of cinnabuns in his coat for his brother because he'd known these demons would descend upon the other. And they did,

because Twice, Toga and Spinner were gathered around the box on the bar while Compress lounged in a chair idly drinking wine and Kurogiri arranged cards in a tower because he'd run out of glasses to polish. "That *would* have been a good idea."

"If he hadn't thought of it first," Dabi drawled, annoyed. He'd brought the green kid to the mall for Shigaraki to talk to, with only three strict rules- don't kill anyone, don't cause mayhem, and don't kill the green kid specifically, because he was his brother's friend- and now it had resulted in *this*. Some stupid, twisted game that Dabi was getting sucked into because Shigaraki was obsessed with becoming a "better player." He'd told Shigaraki that he was on reserve now, didn't want anything public, needed to minimize the chances of piling up too much of a record (that people knew about) because he needed to keep Todoroki Touya's name clean, but Shigaraki had insisted that *someone* go in Twice's place when the man hadn't been available to go for his regularly scheduled kidnapping attempt.

Shigaraki frowned.

"Did he say anything else?"

"Yeah," Dabi said, hoping how irritated he was with having to be the messenger for this part showed through clearly. "He said to buy some new clothes, because you look like you're in pajamas."

Shigaraki scowled. Except he didn't throw a tantrum, or decay anything, because he was actually taking this green brat's advice, and that was why Dabi was convinced he'd stepped into an alternate reality where pigs were going to start flying.

"Homeroom class has been rather fun lately, but I wonder why it changed?" Momo whispered from her seat ahead of them, hand cupped around her mouth.

"I dunno, but m'not complaining," Kyouka said from beside her, a crayon in her mouth as she drew in one of the class's coloring books she'd claimed for herself. She held the crayon box between her knees as the bus rumbled along. When he'd called to ensure it had seat belts and heard that it didn't, Aizawa had full on left the class for about twenty minutes to yell at whoever was on the other end of the phone. Magically, there were seat belts the next day.

"It's nice to have a break from other schoolwork," Ochako said from the row behind. She was sat beside Tsuyu, who was humming as she

listened to rain forest sounds on an iPod. Izuku and Shouto were between them, though for some reason, Ochako had given him a smug look when she'd asked Shouto who he wanted to sit beside and he idly replied *Izuku. Why?*

"It's nice to have a field trip too," Izuku replied, glancing out at the road. "I wonder what the hero learning benefits of a zoo are, though?"

"Well, I dunno, but normal high schools have field trips like that, don't they? I guess Yuuei does sometimes too. It's nice to have a break with finals coming up, too."

Izuku bit his lip when he heard Fumikage groan all the way from the back. He was sitting with Hitoshi, just ahead of Keigo, who had jumped at the chance to help chaperone when asked, and he'd undoubtedly been cracking bird jokes the entire ride. He took up an entire row with his wings and had used the back entrance to get inside easier, rather than squeezing in through the front door.

He looked up towards the front. Aizawa was in the single front seat near the door, looking like he was passed out, and Tensei was smiling patiently in the row behind him as Tenya ranted about something, chopping the air every few seconds. It was probably about the debate that he, Izuku, Momo and Mezo had gotten into about the meaning of an artwork in Midnight's class.

Across from them, he could see Fuyumi's excitement even from behind. She kept gesturing with her hands, sitting as close to her brother as the seats allowed, and though Touya usually looked bored and relaxed, he did look fond as she kept on talking. She was probably the one who talked him into chaperoning in the first place.

"Hey, hey!" Denki's voice called out from the right aisle. "We're here!"

Izuku perked up and leaned closer to the window. The bus driver was pulling to a stop on the street, outside of a large park with a giant set of open gates forming the entry, surrounded by solid walls with trees poking over the top.

The class formed an excited chatter as the bus descended and let the steps down. Aizawa was the first one out, and he stood near the door as they all filed out after him, though Keigo exited through the back. But Aizawa didn't need to worry over him, considering he was a Pro himself.

The bus driver closed its doors once they were all off and pulled away

from the curb. It would be back about three hours later, their itinerary said.

"All right, everyone," Aizawa yelled, catching their attention. "Don't get into trouble. The zoo is routed, so it's one track from the entry and back. Stay where one of the adults can see you."

He turned and started towards the entrance. He showed the personnel attending his Yuuei ID, which was all they needed to find their reservation, and they began handing out day badges to each of them, leaving them to start going inside.

The entrance consisted of two branching paths, marked 'Enter' and 'Exit,' which Izuku guessed was what Aizawa meant by having one route; they waited near a group of chairs for their classmates to come inside and he mentally counted off just to be sure. One, five, ten, fifteen...

Eventually, Shouto started straying towards his siblings. Izuku idly followed him, fiddling with the button Aizawa had them all put on. They all had GPS tracking inside and acted as a security alarm if they pressed it for more than two seconds.

"...remember that time we got to go to the zoo with Mother and we saw that rare tiger with the gigantification Quirk?" Fuyumi was in the middle of saying, hands clasped together as she stared up at Touya with the exact same smile she'd worn on the bus. "I heard this zoo has another animal with a Quirk, I think it has something to do with having unbreakable teeth-!"

Touya was nodding along- Izuku idly wondered if he had another name he used for his 'villainy'- and tilted his head when he saw Shouto approaching. Fuyumi noticed and turned, lighting up even further, if possible. "Shouto! There you are! Hello, Izuku. Here, Shouto, I brought a cooling pack for your neck because of the heat index-"

"I have an ice Quirk," Shouto said, in his usual flat tone, as she took out what looked like a scarf with an ice pack in it and began fitting it around his neck. "I don't even sweat."

"Well, you could! I know how you overdo it, if you get overheated you won't even notice. Don't you remember that one time you didn't notice when you got frostbite after school one day-"

Shouto's ears began to turn pink. Izuku bit his lip to contain a grin.

Shouto noticed him and seemed to get even redder.

His eyes fell on a figure approaching them. Interrupting Fuyumi's embarrassing rant, he held up his hand and made her pause. "Hold on, I need a favor. Can you be friends with the person I interned with?"

"Huh?" Her eyebrows raised, and Touya quirked one as well. "Be friends with-"

"Yes, he has no adult friends. Well, except for one. He was brainwashed by the Hero Commission as a child. I felt like we were very similar so I am friends with him but I feel like an adult needs to have more adult friends."

Fuyumi stared at him for a moment. Then she turned her head away, holding one hand over her mouth to restrain an ugly little laugh, because even though she knew her little brother's general lack of social awareness was due to a terrible upbringing, it was just a little...*funny* sometimes. "S-sure, okay," she stammered, taking a breath.

It was only a moment after that Keigo descended upon them in his usual fashion. He appeared out of nowhere to give Izuku a hug, grinning brightly, and the boy noted how Touya seemed to eye him, looking unimpressed. He supposed a villain wouldn't like to hang out with too many Heroes...which made Touya chaperoning their entire class pretty funny, now that he thought about it.

"Hello, little chicks! Can you believe Fumikage didn't want to hear the eighty-eight facts about rhinos that I know?"

"No," Izuku said at the same time Shouto said "Yes." The youngest Todoroki gave Keigo a blank stare when the man pouted at him.

He let go of Izuku to give Shouto a hug. The boy didn't react much other than raising a hand, which wasn't quite opening his arms for an embrace, but was more than he usually ever did, and both Touya and Fuyumi looked surprised.

Shouto held onto the man's jacket, briefly, before he pulled away. Then he took notice of the other two adults standing there and smiled. "Oh, hi! Are you Shouto's brother and sister? He told me you all look alike, haha-" He sounded chipper, overly so, and Izuku guessed he was probably nervous.

Fuyumi shook herself back into reality. The words *brainwashed by the*

Hero Commission echoed in her mind. Shouto had said it almost too blandly to even process it, but in actuality- that sounded horrifying. And even though the man was the opposite of her brother, emoting more, she felt it was a bit forced. As if he were trying to hide the fact he didn't quite know how to say anything he said.

She put on a smile. "Yes, hello. I'm Fuyumi. This is Touya."

"Haw- I'm, uh, Takami Keigo."

...was he unused to using his own name? Maybe Shouto had been right.

Dabi was a margin more skeptical than his sister. It was a little weird, seeing the number three off-TV; he looked smaller in person, without the thick clothing he wore and his wings. Speaking of, just where were his wings?

"What'd you do with your wings, Keigo?" his brother's green friend asked, conveniently, a moment later, causing the man who'd just hugged his brother to smile sheepishly.

"Ah, I, left them outside in a bush. I came to look at the zoo, not *be* the zoo, you know?"

Dabi wouldn't deny that he felt a *smidge*...okay, quite a bit jealous. He knew he'd been gone for a long time. He also knew that Shouto was fond of him already, but the title of "big brother" wasn't something he'd gotten to be for very long. And Dabi...didn't know *how* to be all outgoing, affectionate, *smiley*. If that was what Shouto wanted, Dabi didn't know how to provide it.

Keigo leaned down and pretended to cup a hand over his mouth. "I'm incognito," he whispered, referring to the absolutely silly way he was dressed. The skinny jeans and bland blue jacket were fine. It was the T-shirt he had on with *Kiddie Class Chaperone 2020* printed on it in Comic Sans that looked goofy.

The corner of Shouto's mouth quirked up.

He'd leaned into it when Keigo hugged him, very subtly, too.

Dabi looked away. Begrudgingly, he supposed, if it made his brother happy, he could deal with getting dragged around with an overly-peppy Hero. He supposed there were worse people he could have gotten stuck with too. Like *All Might.* That man was so goddamned

loud, Dabi was impressed he'd never hurt anyone's eardrums when he yelled.

A streak of red in the corner of his eye caught his attention. Shouto just sighed, looking put-upon, and Izuku rolled his eyes as two tiny red feathers hid themselves in the boys' pockets. "What's that?" Fuyumi asked, sounding curious, and Hawks smiled at her, almost looking embarrassed.

"Oh, I can track them that way. Probably why Eraser let me come, haha..."

Speaking of Eraserhead, who Dabi had mostly avoided simply because he was hard to read, he was coming out of the entrance. "We can get moving," he called out, motioning to the entryway. "I'll be near the back. Walk ahead of me."

It was kind of cheesy that a chorus of *Yes, Aizawa-sensei!* followed his words. Even *Shouto* called it out.

The class began to walk. The path took them upwards, branching out and widening to the point many people could comfortably fit, and led towards the right wing of the zoo. There were exhibits on both sides, where they could peer over the railings into the enclosures below, which were designed to imitate the animals' natural habitats as much as possible.

Izuku liked this particular zoo. He'd never gotten to go before, but he knew they only took rescues that couldn't be returned to the wild. Fuyumi naturally meandered to lead the group, probably used to leading her own class on trips, and her brother followed after her while Keigo darted off to go bother Fumikage more. Far above them, a state of the art enclosure allowed the zoo birds to perch on on a metal webbing that was nearly-transparent from the underside while still allowing them access to their ground enclosure.

The park was fairly quiet that day. Aizawa had probably chosen a low-traffic day, to make wrangling twenty teenagers easier. The occasional sounds of the animals around them were rather relaxing, when not drowned out by crowds.

To his right, he spotted Momo nervously approaching Kyouka, who stood peering over the railing at a group of flamingos. "U-um, excuse me, Kyouka," she said, turning pink when the other girl looked at her. "U-um, did you want to hold hands wh-while we walked through the zoo?"

Izuku bit his lip to contain a smile as Kyouka's face turned red. "Sure," she muttered, staring at the ground instead as she reached out her hand. Lighting up, Momo took it with a smile.

Only a few yards away, Tsuyu watched them and then looked at Ochako beside her with a curious look. Blushing, the other girl looked away, jumping as she'd been caught staring. Wordlessly, Tsu held out her hand, and Ochako took it with an anxious giggle. Mina watched all four of them with a gigantic grin, hands planted on her hips, before turning to Toru and wiggling her eyebrows. "Buddy system?"

Though Izuku couldn't actually see Toru's face, he would have bet she was smiling as her laughter quietly bubbled out. She and Mina joined hands and took off after Denki, who was trying to insist to Hitoshi and Rikido that a penguin had looked him right in the eyes and somehow looked threatening.

'Buddy system' wasn't much of an exaggeration. Hanta and Mashirao, who tended to team up in battle simulations, had started walking together, joined by Mezo and Yuga. Tensei, who, as it turned out, knew sign language, was now having an animated conversation with Koji, translating for his brother while they stayed near the middle of the group. Keigo was still teasing Fumikage about something, poking him repeatedly in the shoulder with a wolfish grin while the teen looked like he wanted to throw him into one of the exhibits.

Eventually, they passed out of the birds section and entered the large animal sector. Most of the students gravitated towards the right, where the tiger exhibit was, but Izuku noted Kacc- Katsuki- had gone to the left, where he was leaning heavily on the railing and raking in laughter about something.

"Honestly, dude," Denki said from beside him, with a sigh, "that thing could probably eat you."

"That's what makes it fucking awesome!"

"Someone's a little excited," Eijirou snorted to himself, looking like he was making sure his friend didn't fall over the railing.

"Didja hear that? You're FUCKING AWESOME!"

Below, a lion looked up at him with a curious head tilt. It was a female lion in the zoo that exhibited a rare genetic mutation that resulted in traits usually seen in males, including a large mane that looked very convincing. After a moment, she got up and meandered

up the large rock she'd been leaning against, opening her maw and letting out a loud roar.

"YEAH! YOU SEE THAT? KING OF THE JUNGLE!"

"Dude, she's a girl," Eijirou sighed, slapping a hand to his face.

"So?! She can be a king too!"

Unintentionally, Izuku found himself snorting. He quickly used both hands to smother his mouth, and the giggles that were trying to break through, feeling his ears turn red when Katsuki tensed and glanced back at him. The boy froze, then quickly turned away, starting to redden himself, and Eijirou gave them both a quick, nervous glance. But there was no blow up, at least, and Izuku quickly moved over towards the right side of the walkway while Shouto followed him with a frown.

"Are you okay?" he asked, quietly enough no one would hear.

"Yeah, I'm fine!" Izuku insisted, putting on what he hoped to be a convincing smile. He spotted the area up ahead, where a sign that read *Rest Area* hung, and pointed. "Let's go get something to drink."

Fuyumi felt keyed up for reasons she couldn't explain.

She had been ecstatic when Shouto's teacher asked her to help chaperone. She hadn't been expecting it, as the others he asked were Pros, but apparently he thought her dealing with middle-schoolers on a daily basis gave her valuable experience dealing with children. She'd even convinced Touya to come along, because how long had it been since they did something nice together, with Shouto? She would have gotten Natsuo to come, too, if he hadn't had a class to attend.

So really, she was happy about the whole thing.

Which was why she was so confused as to why she was getting more and more anxious.

She tried to cover it up by smiling through it. It was what she'd always done. She was just so- *desperate* to make sure they had a good time, that Touya had a good time. And he hadn't even done anything, not at all, he seemed to be enjoying himself, but she still felt like gnawing on her nails.

Everything is fine. Everything is okay.

She'd been so excited. And she'd had to make sure the day went perfectly, that nothing went wrong, that no one got upset about anything...

Everything is okay.

She was fine. She was okay. Things were fine.

She sat on a bench beside her brother, watching the children as they ate snacks from the vending machines, with a half-eaten sandwich from one of them. She felt too sick to finish it. But it would look odd if she didn't, wouldn't it? And it was so hot out, she needed to keep her energy up, and...

Everything was fine.

God, she wasn't fine.

"Fuyumi?" Touya was looking at her, a small furrow in his brow, and Fuyumi panicked when she realized she didn't know how long he'd been saying her name for. "Are you o-"

"S-s-sorry, I need to-to, uh, u-use the restroom!" Fuyumi burst out with a broken laugh, leaping out of her seat and trying to place the sandwich into the trash can beside their bench. It tumbled from her hands, and she didn't know if it made it in, and she ran to the restrooms across the rest area from them, rushing into the women's room.

I'm fine, I'm fine, I'm fine, she told herself, a hiccup escaping her as her pulse raced. *Everything was okay!* So why was she feeling so panicked? Had she taken her medication today? She was so sure she had, but she had rushed that morning, she wasn't sure- she felt so sick, she bent over the restroom trash can and heaved up everything she'd just eaten.

She felt disgusting.

I'm fine.

"E-everything is all right," she whispered to herself, breaths coming in short gasps as she straightened up. She desperately turned on the sink and washed her mouth, reaching for a paper towel to dry herself off, and felt like breaking apart when she realized she was crying. *No, no, no! I'm fine!*

She swiped at the stubborn tears on her face, accidentally knocking her glasses off.

"No," she sobbed, voice cracking as she grasped at the sink, but they'd fallen to the floor. "C-come back-"

There came a knock on the door.

"Fuyumi?" Touya called through, sounding alarmed. "Fuyumi, what the hell? Are you all right?"

"I-I'm fine!" Fuyumi called out, wanting to believe it. She raked through her purse, fumbling and searching until she grasped a bottle of pills, and yanked it out, clinging to it. She just needed to take some, calm down- "I'm f-fine!"

"Fuyumi, you aren't fine," her brother's voice said, making fresh tears spill over her face. *No, no, she was.* She bent down to try and get her glasses and realized her knees felt weak, and she sat down on the floor with a harsh knock against the wall. "That's it. I'm coming in."

"No! I'm fine!"

"If there's any other women in there, sorry, but my sister's having a meltdown," Touya called, dryly, and Fuyumi wanted to laugh because he'd always done that; always diffused things by being sarcastic, always...

Her hand was still scrabbling for her glasses when he stepped inside. He looked down at her and jerked to a stop, and though his face was blurry, she saw his brow furrow. "'Yumi," he said, softly, before pulling the door shut. "Tell me what's the matter."

"N-nothing!" Fuyumi insisted, even as another wave of tears started spilling out. "H-honestly, everything's okay, I-I was just feeling a little sick, and I just need to find my glasses, everything is-"

"Fuyumi." He was close enough now, because he'd knelt down in front of her, that she could see his face mostly-clearly. He looked solemn, and now she'd ruined the entire trip, and she'd ruined the first outing they had with Shouto, and- "Stop it. I'm not Dad."

All of Fuyumi's breath left her in one fell swoop. She let out a broken sob, burying her face in her hands, and Touya's arms gingerly came up to wrap around her. He pulled her into his chest, gently stroking her hair, and let out a slow breath.

"Is that why you've been so hopped up all afternoon? Because you were trying to make sure nothing went wrong?" His voice turned flat, and he tipped his head forward to lean against the back of hers. "I guess that's the job you got stuck with when I left."

"I-I'm sorry," Fuyumi whimpered, feeling pathetic as she bawled into his shirt. She could feel the bandages underneath. "You and Mom were always protecting us, b-but then you were both gone, and I-I should have...I should have helped you more...m-maybe I could have..."

"Hey," he interrupted, just a bit harshly. "You couldn't have done one damned thing to stop what happened. You were a kid. Nothing was your goddamned fault, Fuyumi. What that bastard we called a father did was all of his own making." He let out a deep sigh that sounded irritated, reigning in his anger. "And all these years, you were trying to work around him, trying to make things better, but it didn't work because of *him*. Not because of you."

He glanced down at whatever she was clutching in her hands. Gently, he tugged at it, and read the label. *Alprazolam, 0.25 mg. Take no more than twice daily as needed.*

Another hum of anger coursed through him. Not because she was on medication, but because he knew their father had caused the need for it.

"I should have tried to get Shouto out sooner," Fuyumi whispered, hiding her face in her hand again. "But I just felt so- so *weak*, and...I was scared of him...and-"

"It's not your fault." Touya opened the bottle for her and tapped it against his palm, making a small white pill roll out. He held it out to her along with the water bottle he'd gotten from outside and still been holding when he walked in. "I'm the oldest, 'Yumi, not you. It's *my* job to take care of *you*. I...should have come back sooner."

"Th-there's no way you could have known," Fuyumi whispered, putting the pill into her mouth and taking a sip of water to swallow it. She was still stammering, mostly because of the way her body refused to stop quivering.

Touya didn't react, but Dabi gritted his teeth, hating himself for the fact she was wrong.

"Doesn't matter," he rumbled. "I'm here now. I'm going to take care of Shou. He's fine. I'll take care of you too. No more of this be a mother,

sister, nanny and maid all in one shit. You got that apartment near the house, right?" Mutely, she nodded. "Natsuo lives nearby now. And I have another bedroom, and Mom will be just fine when I get her out. We'll all be together again. You'll never have to worry about *him* ever again."

He reached up with one hand and raked a hand over her hair again. He could remember doing it as a child, when she would come to his room to cry at night because her nightmares wouldn't go away.

"I swear."

Fuyumi pulled in a deep breath and then another. She wasn't crying anymore, even if her heart was still beating fast. But it was beginning to calm down, and the panic attack was receding. She wiped her face with her sleeve. "Th-thank you, Touya," she whispered, realizing belatedly he'd placed her glasses into her lap. She took another deep hiccuping breath. "I just...don't know what I would have done if you hadn't come back..."

Dabi gritted his teeth again. Tried not to let his hands start smoking.

Instead of thinking about how much he hated himself, he stood up and reached for more paper towels to hand down to her. He took both her hands when she was ready to help her up, and she gave him a wobbly smile.

Swear I'm gonna kill that bastard someday. Someday fucking soon.

The door creaked open.

"Uh, Fuyumi-san?" the voice of that fucking Hero whispered out, making Dabi's back go tense. "The kids were wondering why you ran off. I said you hadn't realized your sandwich had tuna in it, so it turned your stomach. So, uhh, if you need an excuse..."

Fuyumi let out a watery laugh. "Th-thank you, and you can just call me Fuyumi. Ah..." She glanced down at her skirt, which had acquired a stain from what appeared to be spilled smoothie on the floor. "I think I ruined my skirt..."

Hawks slipped inside. Then- then he took off his jacket, and reached out to tie it around her waist, and held up a package of disposable hand wipes he'd gotten from the vending machines to help take off her ruined makeup. "You don't need anything extra to be pretty, after all," he chirped out, almost sounding like a real bird, and Fuyumi laughed.

Dabi just watched them, relaxing a little bit, as Hawks...*Keigo*...helped his sister tidy herself up. Contrary to what he'd thought he'd feel, he didn't feel threatened, or jealous- he was...almost grateful, not to a Hero, but to someone who was taking the time to help Fuyumi. He supposed that maybe this Hero wasn't as much of a bastard as the other ones. Already he'd helped two of Dabi's siblings, and with how damaged they were, maybe that wasn't a bad thing.

"All done," Keigo said with a charming smile in front of the mirror, holding his hands up on either side of Fuyumi, after giving her new eyeliner with some that he apparently just carried around in his pocket. Dabi suddenly wondered how much of the man's eye markings were natural and artificial. "Look at that! Ten out of ten!"

Fuyumi smiled. She'd completely calmed down at this point, and the jacket around her waist didn't even look out of place; it looked like it could have been her size. Keigo's bangs, brushed back as if he'd been flying, even though he'd ridden there on a goddamned bus, brushed against her ear, making her chuckle. She was ticklish basically from the waist up.

A small part of Dabi noted that Keigo wasn't that bad himself.

"Now why don't we go back outside and have a fun time at the zoo?"

And of course they had to exit the restroom together to be greeted by screaming outside, because apparently someone had fallen into the lions' enclosure, and the entire class was panicking for some reason despite facing off against real villains and every single one was yelling specifically for Aizawa, because that was just how life went sometimes.

queen of beasts

Chapter Summary

bakugou: one screamy boi
butch lion: i see that you're being screamy on someone else's behalf for once, so i approve

The infamous lion with unbreakable teeth. Izuku had wanted to see her like everyone else, but he'd waited until the half of the class that Bakugou *wasn't* in was clustered by the railing before going over to look. He watched her for a while, admiring the bright sheen to her incisors as she lazily lapped at her paws, and wondered about her Quirk- were they truly unbreakable, in the sense they were the toughest substance on the planet? Or had they simply not found anything that would hurt them yet? He'd heard that she'd torn through three steel fences without breaking a sweat when she was first brought to the zoo, since they'd kept her in isolation at first to watch her behavior; apparently not being allowed with the other lionesses upset her just a *little*. Maybe the teeth were like metal themselves. But, they couldn't be too heavy, or else she wouldn't be able to move...

The chatter of his classmates was the only noise around him as they watched the lions below. Some other visitors had come onto the path now, streaming easily by. It wasn't too busy, so he didn't think anyone would notice if he floated just a few inches off the ground to get a better look. It really was impressive.

Something shoved him from behind. *Hard*.

Izuku let out a yelp when he felt his head connect with something. It was part of the rail, he noted, dully, because it felt like just a moment before he was hitting the ground and water had splashed all over him from the shallow pond below for the lions to drink from. It had happened so suddenly, and he'd been so distracted, that he went tumbling straight down, brain scrambled for just a few seconds while his friends let out screams.

"Izuku!"

"Izuku! Oh my god!"

"What happened?!"

"IS THAT THE LION WITH UNBREAKABLE TEETH?!"

"SOMEONE GET AIZAWA-SENSEI-"

Izuku sat up dizzily. He was startled, still, but he wasn't completely terrified or anything of the like, so he was able to take stock of everything in just a few milliseconds. Ochako had her hands on the rail like she was ready to climb after him, while Tenya held onto her and reminded her in the midst of his rant they weren't allowed to use their Quirks in public and could just make things worse and to just let Aizawa-sensei get him, while everyone else latched onto that piece of information and started screaming for the man. And just a few yards to his right, the lioness had climbed off her perch and was now approaching him curiously, ears perked up.

He gulped when he saw the shine of her teeth close up. He didn't want to test how unbreakable they were *personally*.

Water exploded into his face again, making him jump, and he realized that it was someone landing in front of him.

Aizawa had been standing with the other group watching some tigers on the other side of the path, but he whirled around when the commotion started and broke into a sprint to cross the short distance separating him from half his kids. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw a streak of orange, and he swore that someone else was *jumping* into the enclosure, and he swore he was going to tear his hair out-

"THE STUPID IDIOT JUST FELL IN, DUMBASS! YOU'RE TOO COOL TO BE EATING PEOPLE ANYWAY SO JUST GO CHOW DOWN ON A GAZELLE OR SOMETHING SOMEWHERE ELSE!"

...yes, yes, that was Bakugou screaming at a lion with unbreakable teeth.

A few civilian visitors screeched in fear when the boy's palms exploded, his usual too-enraged-to-actually-tell-what-face-he-was-making scowl in place.

The lioness stared at him. He was standing in a pond, orange sneakers soaking wet, having splashed his jeans and the plain T-shirt he was wearing, with a twitch in his brow and smoking palms. He looked more like a wet kitten than a threat, but the lioness just stared at him for a moment, then swished her tail, turned around, and lazily walked away again.

Aizawa stared at the whole thing, one foot on the railing and his capture weapon floating around him as he'd been preparing to jump down, and he couldn't even say he was surprised, because of course Bakugou had just screamed a lion into ignoring him.

Bakugou and Midoriya then seemed to actually notice each other, and the class watched them in mute silence.

Bakugou looked over his shoulder and jerked. He looked away, his scowl turning into something almost sullen enough to be a pout. Midoriya reached up to gingerly rub at his head, looking thrown off guard.

"...well, you were just sitting there, so you probably gave yourself a fucking concussion or something!" Bakugou barked out, glaring into nothingness. He looked down at the water under their feet and paused. A strange expression crossed his face, one that Aizawa had never seen before, and he didn't move, only because the lions weren't paying them attention now, because he felt like he needed to let this go uninterrupted. "...whatever."

He stuck out his hand. He wasn't looking anywhere near Midoriya, who looked more confused than anything else. Izuku glanced down at the pond and remembered a similar moment years and years ago, when he'd had his own hand slapped away, and wondered if maybe Kacchan didn't hate him so much anymore.

He took Bakugou's hand. The taller boy pulled him up, muttering, and turned away fully, folding his arms like he was sulking.

Well.

Izuku yelped when a feather flew out of his pocket and wedged itself in his collar. He heard Katsuki let out a shout halfway between angry and startled as one did the same to him, lifting him out of the pen, and he yelled angrily and let off a few small explosions as it carried him to safety on the boardwalk again. "DON'T FUCKING FLY ME LIKE THAT YOU CHICKEN-"

"I'm not a chicken!" Keigo called out from somewhere, sounding offended. "You're *welcome*!"

Aizawa spent ten minutes drying out Midoriya's unruly hair on a park bench, surrounded by the boy's worried friends, while an attendant stammered through apology after apology, saying they'd never had

anyone fall before and constructed the railings so it should have been pretty much impossible. However, he wasn't surprised that his class of all classes had managed to pull off the impossible yet again. He didn't think they could go anywhere without at least one small disaster. Midoriya was nothing if not sheepish, offering up his own apologies and saying he'd been floating when someone jostled him, so it was his fault, which Aizawa severely doubted.

Someone else might have taken the excuse, but he found himself narrowing his eyes at the railing in suspicion. It was impossible to stumble through the bottom, since it was constructed more like a fence, and it was made for those standing at an adult height, which meant even if Izuku was floating a head above his peers the height shouldn't have mattered. There was a second railing hanging down, where an adult would hold for balance or knock their head if they started to lean too far forward.

And besides that, he knew Midoriya wasn't stupid. He was practiced enough with Float that a minor accidental shove from one of the students wouldn't have sent him catapulting down off-balance.

What were the chances of him just falling in?

It just didn't feel right.

"All right, class, we're moving on," he called out, not wanting to rush or panic them but wanting to get them moving so they could return to the bus on time. He made a mental note to get the camera footage from the zoo, which he was sure would be forthcoming since they'd never had a lawsuit leveled against them before and wouldn't want one now.

While watching his class funnel into the hallway towards the next section, led by Ingenium and Hawks, his eyes fell on Bakugou, walking with a slight hunch near the back as he stared at the back of Kirishima's shoes with his jaw jutted out.

He jumped when Aizawa let a hand land on his head.

The boy looked up at him looking like he was expecting to get chastised. Even though he should have let Aizawa handle it, he didn't think reminding him of that would help anything. For once, he'd done something to help another student, and he couldn't downplay that. "Good job."

Bakugou's expression seized up for a moment in surprise. Jerking his

head away, he huffed out a mumbled *whatever* under his breath and walked away, the tips of his ears red.

"Goodness." They were in the aquarium now, watching Shouto sit on a bench and stare up at a swirl of colorful fish before him with his left hand on Midoriya's shoulder to warm him up after getting wet, and Fuyumi felt suddenly paranoid to take her own class on field trips anymore. "I'm glad I didn't apply to teach at a Hero school."

Beside her, Touya snorted. "Kids get into messes and shit all the time."

"Well, Yuuei just seems a little unlucky."

"So cursed?"

"Not cursed!"

"So cursed."

Keigo swept in front of them, shoving the boy with a bird Quirk- what was his name? Fumikage?- by the shoulders. "See?" he chirped, pointing at a fish behind the glass. "It's just like you!"

Fumikage squinted at the fish. Fuyumi glanced at it, too. It was a black one with dark blue and deep purple colored lines running across its body that gave it the strange appearance of having a grumpy expression. "How is that fish like me?"

"It's an emo fish!"

Fumikage's eyes nearly rolled back in his head as he turned and groaned, storming away while Keigo snickered at him. He turned, but didn't follow him.

Fuyumi found her eyes straying to the man's back. His shirt was skintight, something she hadn't understood the need for until he'd taken his jacket, which had vents cut into the back, off. The base of his wings was...odd, in a way. It looked as though he had strange markings on his back, where tiny, fluffy red feathers were growing and needed unobstructed access to the air.

Dabi gave it a brief look-over too. It was weird, getting to see the most vulnerable part of such a high-ranking Hero's Quirk up close and personal without currently being in a fight with him. Part of his brain wondered how it felt- the base of the wings had to be the most

sensitive part.

The more dickish part of his brain really wanted to reach out and dig his fingers into part of it just to find out, but that would probably cause an *incident*.

"HEEEEEY! THERE YOU ARE! YOU CHICKEN NUGGET!"

Fuyumi squeaked as she jumped. Hell, Dabi couldn't blame her, he nearly stumbled himself as something streaked past them with the speed of a bullet. A well-built woman in a crop top and jeans came to a smoking stop beside Keigo, her rabbit tail and ears standing out like a giant flag, and he raked in a breath. *Another* top-ten hero?

"Rumi!" Keigo exclaimed, beaming, as he turned to greet his friend. "You made it!"

"You said you were going to a zoo! You never fuckin' go to anything fun! I had to come!"

Keigo let out a sheepish laugh and brushed a hand through his hair. It was then the woman noticed them standing there and turned to grin at them. In the dim lighting, her teeth almost looked sharp. "Oh, sorry. Usagiyama Rumi. I- oh, wait, are you two the Todoroki ones? Hey, if I ever meet Endeavor I'll punch him in the face for you!"

"U-um, thank you, but you don't have to," Fuyumi said with a nervous laugh, turning pink when she reached out to shake the hero's hand and felt just how strong her grip was. Her outfit left little to the imagination; she could see every line of muscle she had built up. "I'm Todoroki Fuyumi. This is my brother Touya."

"Feel free to punch him," Dabi countered when the woman stuck her hand out to him. It was a good thing he'd worn some compression gloves again, so she wouldn't feel his staples; the League had managed to find someone with a useful enough illusion Quirk all he had to do to shift his appearance was slide on a ring, but anyone could still feel his skin and its texture.

"Touya," Fuyumi whispered, halfheartedly, while the Hero laughed.

"Don't worry about it! I'll punch anyone, Hero or not! Hey, hey, Keigo, we should figure out a way to bully him at the next hero board meetup," the woman continued, hooking an arm around her friend's neck and dragging him in close. "Public humiliation! It's even more effective than punching."

Dabi decided that a grand total of two Pro Heroes possibly weren't so bad.

"We should go out for drinks after this! I mean, not right after this, because you're watching kiddies, but tonight. Wait, you two are old enough to drink, right?"

"Of course I am!" Fuyumi insisted with a flush to her cheeks, which Dabi wasn't sure was due to her embarrassment at the question of her age or drinking experience. Had his sister drank before? Had she even had a celebratory birthday shot? Dabi didn't even know- "I'm twenty-two."

Rumi looked at him. "Twenty-four," he drawled.

She snickered. "Well, okay then. *Keigo* here has never drank before. Can you believe that?" She pinched a reddening Keigo's cheek, making him pout as he tried and failed to shove her off. "You've got to live a little-"

"I am living!"

"All you do is work!"

While the two bickered, Dabi caught sight of Shouto staring at them. The boy raised his hand not on Midoriya's shoulder in a thumbs-up. Dabi resisted the urge to rub at his face and make his staples start to itch.

Izuku was sitting in the aisle seat instead of the window seat when they got back onto the bus because it had gotten unbearably hot-feeling out again and Shouto let him sit on whichever side suited him best for the temperature when he felt his phone buzz. He looked down to find a bit of an odd notification.

[2 am crush posting]

{Uraraka Ochako added Tokoyami Fumikage]

Fumikage: please do not torment me ochako

Ochako: I overheard takami-san teasing you in the zoo :)))))

Momo: What's this?

Ochako: :))))))

Fumikage: :/

Ochako: :)))))))))))))

Fumikage: Fine. She and Hawks are both convinced I have a crush on Mezo.

Izuku: i mean...

Fumikage: you too???

Izuku: Don't act like I'm betraying you! It's very obvious!

Fumikage: I am NOT obvious!

Momo: I think having those kinds of feelings for someone is a wonderful thing, Fumikage. :)

Ochako: what she means is now we can all suffer in crush zone TOGETHER!

Fumikage: wait, who does izuku have a crush on?

Ochako: guess

Fumikage: Oh

Izuku: :/ thanks

Fumikage: You did it to me first.

Momo: At least Ochako and I both acknowledge our feelings...

Ochako: yeah, you two are in denial zone, not crush zone

Shouto asked him what he was pouring over so intently, and Izuku stuffed his phone into his bag, turning the color of a beet and stammering out an excuse, while Ochako watched him with a smug grin from two aisles down.

Pride

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

They did, in fact, go out for drinks, even though Dabi hadn't been expecting they would, because as soon as he and Fuyumi got back to the house with Shouto where Natsuo was waiting to watch him for the night, his sister turned bubbly and excited and told him it was just a short train ride to the bar that "Rumi" had sent her. All he could think was *wait, what?* before she was shoving him out the door into the waning sun.

A pair of muscled hands slammed four mugs down onto their table. "We're starting off with beer!" the rabbit hero cheered, sliding a glass to them in tandem and grinning. She took extra care, however, in making sure Fuyumi's didn't slosh anywhere.

"I've actually never had beer before," Fuyumi said with a vaguely embarrassed smile, holding the mug in such a funnily prim way as she took a small sip. "Only sake and vodka..."

Sake and vodka? Shit, Dabi would have assumed she'd just tasted a few wines. Maybe grade school teachers got more stressed out at the end of the work week than anyone thought...

He decided to drink relatively conservatively. It wasn't like he was a stranger to a hangover, but his body didn't exactly like them. Vomiting in particular wasn't fun with the staples in his face. Rumi was apparently determined to sample every kind of alcohol they could, as she went and got some sort of mixed drink, then rum, then tequila in shots, insisting Keigo try them all.

"I-I dunno about this one, Rumi," the winged man said, a flush to his face as he stared down at his shot glass. "It smells weird..."

He looked different in the bar's low lighting. The lights made his hair look as though it sparkled, glittering like gold. He wore a relatively thick coat since he'd retracted some of his wings, just large enough to each be the length of his forearm, but from Dabi's angle, he could see his entire body; long legs accentuated by some sort of strange, heeled boots he was wearing, the splash of midriff peeking out from where the skintight shirt he had on was too short.

"Just try it," Miruko urged, a laugh in her voice.

Keigo pulled a face and threw the shot back. His wings fluttered, too fast, like a hummingbird, like it was some kind of instinctive reaction. He shivered, then pulled a face.

Rumi patted him on the shoulder. "And that's tequila."

The wings fluttered again when she touched him. Being so small, so light, they seemed to react to everything.

Keigo's pink face had gotten redder. He laughed, and some kind of noise entered his voice- high-pitched and lilting. Immediately, he clapped a hand over his mouth and looked embarrassed, the noise moving to his throat. "Ah, sorry," he said, once he'd regained his composure.

Fuyumi, already drunk off her ass, let out a giggle. "That's cute! Can you chirp like a bird?"

"Ah- no, no, it's not...important."

"He sure can!" Rumi boomed, slamming him on the shoulder again. He squeaked, or rather chirped, again, and the wings fluttered and puffed out. Dabi found himself almost entranced with seeing how he would react to any given stimuli. "What did I tell you? Animal Quirks are awesome, be a fucking bird!"

Keigo cleared his throat and glanced away, obviously trying to hide his embarrassment.

Dabi found a shifty grin crawling onto his own face. "Guess I'll call you birdie then, huh?"

Keigo's head whipped back around. "Huh?" he squawked, face reddening further, not from the alcohol. Rumi and Fuyumi snickered in unison at him.

"Yeah," Rumi agreed, as if picking up on something Keigo wasn't, and reached across the table to walk her fingers up Fuyumi's shoulder. "If you wanna call me bunny, I wouldn't mind."

Fuyumi's face blossomed in red.

Dabi couldn't even be mad. The only real check mark he had for his siblings' partners was hating Endeavor, after all.

The night turned much longer than any of them thought it would.

It was past two in the morning when they came stumbling into Rumi's apartment. It was nearby, and Dabi didn't want to wake Shouto or Natsuo up by coming stumbling in tipsy with Fuyumi. Most of the stumbling was due to Keigo and Fuyumi, actually, because they were total lightweights, and Rumi could still walk straight despite slurring all her sentences.

They actually got on quite well. Dabi had made some dry remark making fun of Keigo for not being able to hold his liquor, and the woman had started laughing at him, a harsh, barking sound that she repeated when he said much of anything, because she shared his dark sense of humor. When the bartender finally called out that everyone needed to leave, he muttered something under his breath that made her cackle and Fuyumi cover her face while Keigo shaded his eyes.

"Bedrooooom's overr therree," the hero called as she half-carried Fuyumi to what Dabi assumed was her own.

He dropped the other Pro on the guest room bed and then went in search of the sofa to sleep on. He had a headache already, even though he'd had plenty of water, because his body hated it when he dehydrated himself. He woke to the sound of vomiting.

"There ya go, get it all out," the voice of Rumi said from the bathroom, where she was holding his sister's hair back as she puked into the toilet.

Fuyumi groaned and rolled her eyes, leaning her forehead against one hand as she sat on her knees quivering. "I knew I shouldn't drink so much," she complained. "Honestly, every time I get a hangover I tell myself never again, and then I get invited to a teachers' party..."

A loud clang startled the two women. Dabi twisted on the sofa and found Keigo had stumbled out of the bedroom, grimacing like Death itself had its claws in him, and had accidentally knocked over the plastic cookie jar on Rumi's counter. He now stood there holding onto it for support.

"Getting drunk fucking sucks," he whined, and it made Dabi think of those few high-pitched noises he'd made the night before. He smirked as he stood up, making sure his own balance was good first, before approaching the kitchenette.

Predictably, Keigo's expression twisted. "Sink," Dabi said, giving his

shoulder a light push. The man turned and started retching into Rumi's kitchen sink, and he reached out to catch his bangs on impulse before they got in the way.

"See?" Rumi called from the bathroom. "Life experiences!"

Keigo groaned in response.

Fuyumi and Keigo stopped puking at about the same time. In the background, he could hear Rumi making light conversation, assuring the younger woman it was no trouble at all and she'd done *way* worse things in her bathroom; at some point the night before she had gravitated to talking to Fuyumi, asking about things like what she did and what she liked. Keigo started to straighten up; Dabi grabbed the roll of paper towels sitting on the counter to his right and set it down near the sink.

"Thanks," the other man muttered, head down and not looking at him as he tore some from the roll and wiped his mouth before tossing it into the trash. The back of his neck was red. Dabi could see it, because he wasn't wearing that jacket anymore, and so he could see the base of his wings too. It looked...*fluffy*. Fluffy little down feathers lined each slit in Keigo's back, all red, but if he squinted, Dabi could have sworn they had gold speckles near the base. He had made his wings even smaller, probably to get around easier, and this close, he could see there were some that simply *could not* have been able to detach, because they looked like they were coming straight out of his skin.

He really, really wanted to reach out and touch them.

"You all right, birdie?"

Keigo jumped, as if he'd thought Dabi would forget that part of the night (oh no, he wasn't forgetting anything), and his face started to redden too as he gave him an unconvincing smile. "Ah, I'm fine! What about you? Guess you have a pretty high tolerance, haha..."

"Oh, I'm just peachy." He'd also been, basically, an alcoholic from the age of fourteen to fifteen, when he was wandering the streets, so his tolerance wasn't really acquired the best way, but he'd found better outlets for his problems now. Like arson. "Where's those wings of yours?"

"Oh, uh, they're in the other room. I should- probably go get those." Keigo's cheesy smile didn't waver as he turned to leave the kitchenette. Dabi held out a hand, in a mostly normal gesture, like he

was just holding it up to catch his attention, but he made sure he made contact with the exposed skin on the Pro's stomach. Predictably, he jerked to a stop, ears reddening. Dabi could have sworn there were tiny little...*somethings* growing at the man's hairline.

"Should ask for some aspirin," he suggested, like he hadn't done anything on purpose.

"Right!" Keigo exclaimed, throwing on a sunny grin. "I'll ask Rumi!"

Dabi lowered his hand. Keigo started for the bedroom again, and he stood there and let himself smirk after him.

Not every single hero was shit, he supposed. This one just happened to be rather cute.

"We should do this again next week!" Rumi boomed from her bedroom. "Just get a little less sloshed!"

There were over forty messages waiting on his phone.

Keigo felt his stomach churning as he scrolled through his notifications. They were from his handlers, mostly his main one, Sotaru, wondering where he was and why he'd turned his GPS off. They'd been wondering lots of things lately.

Why he'd told his dietician he didn't need her services anymore. Why he'd changed the locks on his apartment. Why he'd been calling in less, why he'd been taking odd patrol routes more.

...why he hadn't come in the last week to have the talons that grew naturally from his toes trimmed, as usual, as he had like clockwork for the last ten years. They weren't giant, or too invasive, but he couldn't wear normal shoes with them, and they were too unsightly. They didn't fit with the perfect image the Commission had made him.

He didn't know if he could think about the Commission anymore without feeling a little sick. Especially not, after all his little interns- even if they weren't technically his interns anymore- had left one day, and he'd been left alone in his office, because wasn't that how it always was? Being left *alone*- Rumi had showed up, popping up out of his elevator to take him out to eat, and just the mention of doing something that would normally get him chastised had sent him into tears. He hadn't had a breakdown in- so long. And the worst part was- he'd spilled it all, or at least most of it, told her the Commission had

basically bought him and watched his every move and she'd held him for an hour and growled in his ear that he was *going to do things his way now*. She gave him a second phone to use for his personal life- hah, as if he had a personal life. She told him that if they ever came for him, to call her and she would be there. She'd also given him the new boots, because she was rather an expert on needing odd footwear considering her own Quirk. His talons weren't overly obstructive, but having a slight heel made it easier to walk, so the angle they grew at wasn't constantly opposed to the ground.

He pulled up his conversation with Sotaru and took a deep breath.

I had an engagement last night, was busy. Sorry. Any new info on a case?

His phone rang almost immediately.

"Hawks," she said across the line, tone crisp and just on the cusp of *You need to come in for a talk.* He knew what a *talk* meant. "Where have you been?"

Keigo kept his voice steady with confidence he didn't. "Did you not get my text? I told you I had an engagement; I kept my emergency pager on for anything that required my attention. Did you need me for something?"

"What I need is to know I can reach you when we need to. What was this engagement?"

"It was private business. Do you need something, Sotaru-san?"

There was a moment of silence.

He sounded polite, but he had never been so brash before.

"I have been informed you told Furuya-san you did not require her services anymore, and you have not come in for your scheduled visits to keep the physical aspects of your Quirk in line. Is there something I need to know, Hawks?"

Keigo felt a bitter smile cross his face. He knew what that meant. *Are you rebelling against us, Hawks?*

But they hadn't trained him for nothing. He could play this game.

"Not at all. I was simply being pragmatic. I am extremely grateful for the Commission's help getting on my feet, after all, but I am of age

and a Pro now; I can handle these things on my own, and it's a waste of resources and expenses to have those services continue needlessly. Now, I actually have a few more matters to attend to today. Did you need anything else?"

The silence was deafening. He'd basically just told her he wouldn't let the Commission control anything other than his missions anymore, and there was a thin line between that and having his license revoked- but he was too valuable to them right now to have that happen.

"Just one thing. We have a new mission for you; an infiltration mission."

"With?"

"The League of Villains."

Keigo refrained from sucking in a breath. That was...muddy territory. Because Izuku, one of his chicks, someone who by all rights Keigo should have been terrified for and yet found himself fearing for the Commission instead despite all logic if they tried to do anything to the kid, had mentioned the League to him before. He even said he knew some of them. And when Keigo had looked at him like he was crazy-

The world isn't black and white, Keigo. Heroes- villains- are we really all just one or the other? Or is each of us just someone trying to protect our own?

He listened as she told him the details. Before she hung up, she said, in a softer voice, "Be careful, Hawks," because her heart wasn't made entirely of stone, and yet she was dangerous at the same time.

He supposed Izuku was right.

Nothing really was black and white.

That night, Keigo landed swiftly on the roof of an abandoned building and waited for the signal he'd been told he would see. Below, there was a brief flash of light, and he swooped down further, catching a glimpse of a pocket mirror in the hand of whoever he was meeting with before it was put away into a coat pocket. It was his informant.

A man stepped out from the shadows. He wore a long overcoat and ragged clothing underneath, and he sported pitch black hair and scars all over his body that almost made Keigo wince in sympathy.

He did look like what he would have expected from a League member. Yet he also looked...familiar, somehow.

"So," the man drawled, in a deep, ragged voice that went straight down Keigo's spine. "You the pigeon that wants in?"

"That'd be me," Keigo replied smoothly, putting on the smile he used for the press. *Focus on something else.* "I'd say nice to meet you, but, well...how nice can a meeting in a dingy alley really be?"

The man's face pulled up into a wicked smirk. His voice dropped even further, somehow.

"Oh, Wings, you've got *no* idea."

Against his will, Keigo found himself starting to redden. Had he seriously just heard that? His first meeting with a League member, and he had to get the one with a voice from heaven- or maybe hell- chock full of innuendo, when he was already still internally screaming about puking in front of Todoroki Touya and his stupid pretty face? Even worse, somehow, this guy made the staple thing work for him.

Focus on something other than how hot the guy is!

"Hawks, but I'm sure you already knew that," he offered, waving the tip of one wing.

The man grinned at him again.

"Dabi."

Keigo honestly had no idea it was him.

Dabi had been skeptical that he'd be able to keep his cover, which would turn into a disaster, yet, when he stepped into the light, he saw a look of *am I having deja vu?* but no true recognition flicker in Keigo's eyes. Which made the entire thing hilarious.

Part of how he tried to keep his identities separate was his voice. He talked normally as Touya, even made an effort to make his voice sound like he'd never picked up a cigarette in his life, but as Dabi he made it gravelly on purpose. He tried to sound as much like a chainsmoker as he possibly could. It certainly seemed to do the trick, because as soon as he spoke the look on Keigo's face that told him he may even slightly recognize him fled.

Look, all I'm gonna say is, Miruko had said with a scowl when he and Fuyumi had seen Keigo staring at his phone. *Don't trust the fuckin' Hero Commission. Maybe get your brother to consider a different line of work right now.*

So he had no doubt the bird was here on Commission orders. He was just interested as to how far he was willing to go for it.

What are you made of, hero?

Aizawa was *furious*.

Honestly, he could say that pretty often these days. If it wasn't one thing it was another. If one student wasn't in crisis five others were. Did he need to get those child leashes for them all? Even with two other Pros and another two adults chaperoning, something had still happened at the zoo.

It had only taken about a day for the sanctuary to send their video footage over. He poured over it, at first focusing on when Midoriya had fallen. There had been other visitors walking past, more adults, which made it harder to see the children, and Aizawa couldn't see anyone specific do it, but he did see Midoriya be propelled from the ledge faster than anyone could have physically fallen. Someone had pushed him.

The worst part? Whoever had done it was smart, because no one immediately left after. All the visitors started to scream and cry out and gathered around the railing. There was no shady suspect in a hoodie darting away. So Aizawa tracked his class through the whole zoo, watching them on camera, but he couldn't pinpoint a single person who'd been following them.

He really only had one conclusion after that, and it wasn't a great one. But for what reason had someone tried to kill Midoriya-

Again?

The shooting incident had turned into a cold case. The criminals weren't talking, and it was unknown who they'd been aiming for, but now...

The clues were not pointing in a good direction.

He knocked on Nedzu's office door and barely waited for a 'come in'

before he barged inside.

"Someone's trying to murder Midoriya," he said, bluntly, which made All Might, who'd been sitting there sipping tea, cough and spew it all over the table. He looked up at Aizawa with eyes widened in worry, and he stared back with bags under his own. "I'm afraid they took a hit out on him."

Yagi's mouth opened and closed without producing any words.

"Well, that's not good, is it?" Nedzu said, with maybe fake, maybe real cheer, pulling his computer monitor closer. "Sit down, let's have a look at this."

Chapter End Notes

> p.s. i've decided due to commenting patterns and university starting again that I'll only be posting on saturdays from now on (that doesn't mean every fic will update, just whatever i have available!) also, my tumblrs are listed on my profile for any ask related needs and all spam including anything not relating to any fic content will be deleted. thanks!

kind of a massive deal

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"I see," Nedzu said with a tiny little smile verging on terrifying, swinging his heels back and forth as he perused the contents of his computer screen. It was, to put it simply, part of the dark web that villains, criminals and thieves often traipsed about. Most thought of the 'dark web' as some scary, unreachable mythical place, but it was actually horrifyingly easy to access and find illegal sales and bulletins without much effort. The police investigated at least 20% of cases that were naive civilians who'd just been curious.

It had taken some digging to get to the page he was on, however. It was set up like a forum, a place where jobs were posted, and 147 accounts had taken up the hit that an anonymous poster had put out on one Midoriya Izuku.

"Oh my god," All Might murmured into his hands, a quiet wheezing sound leaving his mouth as he sat there. He probably needed to use his inhaler that Recovery Girl had put him on. "And- is there any way to- to find these villains? I..."

He looked a little lost. Aizawa mocked him sometimes for being behind the times, but he couldn't now, when he looked so worried. Hell, he was worried. It was pretty apparent that All Might looked at Midoriya like a son, and the idea of over a hundred villains trying to kill him was probably freaking him out.

"Oh, I *will* find them," Nedzu said, a little too sweetly, as he began typing. Aizawa couldn't help but grimace a little. It had been ages since Nedzu had taken on a personal student, and he must have taken it as an insult to his intelligence (which never went well) that someone was trying to kill his now. (Midoriya training with Nedzu was chilling enough on its own, really, but that was a thought for another day.) "Trust me on that! I've even been able to confirm that the first hit- the incident at the mall, with that criminal who could transform his hand into a pistol, and the driver- were two people on this forum, and I've frozen and hidden the original posting. However, in the meantime, we will need to give Midoriya-kun extra protection while we track down each of these accounts- and more importantly, the original poster. I'll need you two to go and find him immediately. I

am afraid someone could make an attempt as soon as in the next five minutes."

All Might straightened in his chair, brow furrowing in concern. Aizawa grabbed his shoulder before he did anything brash. "We'll drive to the Midoriya residence," he said dryly. "Don't use up more time than you need. He is probably at home, and we don't want to alarm his mother more than we need."

"Right, right," All Might murmured, nodding in agreement, even though he looked like he still wanted to vault out the window. "Let's go right away, then?"

Fortunately, Midoriya Inko took the news shockingly well, and did not in fact have a heart attack like Aizawa might have feared. After seeing her gnaw on her nails in worry over gunshot wounds and pseudo-broken spines already, Aizawa felt guilty for putting her through more stress. She looked so much like her son, and the stark lack of anyone else in the Midoriya residence or any of the photos on the wall made him feel...responsible.

"I personally assure you that now that we are aware of the situation, we will not let anymore harm befall him," he said, almost feeling an urge to reach out and lay his hands over hers, wringing themselves together. He'd never been big on that type of thing, Hizashi was better at comforting people, but all he could see was his student, and his student's worried mother, and it felt as though his circle of worry was expanding. "We are already working at tracking down each of the online accounts that interacted with the posting. And I apologize, but I have to ask if there is anyone you can think of that might have posted it in the first place."

Inko, sat across from them on the other sofa and worrying on her thumb nail, frowned as she lowered her eyes to the coffee table. They hedged to the side, and then back, as if she was guilty for what she was about to say. "Well...I...please, don't tell Izuku I mentioned anything if- if it turns out he had nothing to do with it, but...we don't have a good relationship with his father." Aizawa tensed, and he knew Toshinori did as well, because his hands clenched the fabric of his trousers. "H-he was...abusive. There was- a-an incident, when Izuku was about four, and I barely kept Hisashi from hurting him more than he had. He had a burn on his back- his father could breathe fire, you see-" *God, no wonder Midoriya had been able to relate to Todoroki-* "It was fortunately not very serious. I...was more injured than he was,

since we fought before the police arrived. Then he was arrested, and they found him guilty, and I...tried not to think about him anymore."

"I'm..." Aizawa's throat felt dry. Cool fury mixed with intense revulsion was mixing together in his gut, but he pushed it away. He could be floundered by the even more horrifying part of Midoriya's younger years later. "Terribly sorry that happened, ma'am. May I ask why you did not pursue a name change?"

The woman's expression became guilty again. "Honestly," she murmured, looking at her hands, "I was just tired. They told me he had a twenty-year sentence...I-I thought we were free of him, and it's such a lengthy process to get a name change- all the insurance, and bills, and accounts...and Izuku was just entering school, and I was...tired."

"I understand. I only ask because I recommend you do so now. Even if he was not involved in this incident, it would be wise to make it harder for him to find you."

"Yes. You're right. And if he was, well-" Inko's face pulled taut, a shimmer entering her eyes. "Could that be part of how he f-found Izuku-?"

"Nothing is your fault, please," Toshinori said, sounding stricken as he reached out and took her hands. "Please understand. Izuku goes to the most prestigious school in the country, and he won the Sports Festival, at that. Even if his name had been different, I am sure a villain like that would have noticed." Looking mildly appeased, Inko nodded.

"T-thank you, All Might-san. You...you're right, I will put in for a name change. I probably shouldn't use my maiden name, either, then, because he knew that one?"

"I wouldn't advise it."

"Well...I suppose I can just use my old name," Inko said, catching Aizawa's attention. Something in the air had just shifted. His hair was standing up on his neck, and he felt a sense like he was about to open a can of worms.

"Old name?" he asked.

Inko mustered a weak smile. "Oh, yes. See, I was very young at the time, so I don't remember much, but my mother gave me up for adoption. Ishizaki is the name of the family that adopted me. But my

original name was Shimura."

Aizawa felt like the air's temperature had just dropped ten entire degrees.

He looked to the side. Toshinori had blanched, and he looked like he was about to cough up blood. "Sh-Shimura?" he asked, voice wavering. "A-are you...s-sure that was...your original name, Inko-san?"

"Yes?" Inko looked at him, confused, and mildly concerned about his wan appearance. "Are you all right, All Might-san?"

Toshinori looked like he'd seen a ghost.

And Aizawa felt like he had too.

Because he'd seen a photo of Shimura Nana once. All Might had gotten sentimental, when he and Hizashi and Shouta and Nemuri were in the staff room grading on a late night, and Nemuri had convinced him to show them a picture of his old master, since he'd said she was beautiful.

And now he could see it.

Inko's face was rounder, but the gentleness was there. Her hair, tied in a bun, suddenly seemed a vivid image of the way Shimura Nana tied her hair. Her nose was the same shape.

Hesitantly, he looked over to the pictures on the wall, showing off when Inko had been skinnier. She was still just as beautiful, but it was easier to compare when her physique was more similar to Shimura Nana's- though the muscle wasn't there. In her younger years, the resemblance was even more uncanny. "What was your Quirk again, Inko-san?" he muttered.

"I...make things float towards myself?"

"Oh my," Toshinori said, weakly, as he put a heart to his chest and grabbed onto the sofa for support.

"All Might-san? Aizawa-san? What's-"

"I think," Aizawa said, slowly, as he put a hand on his colleague's shoulder. "We should discuss that later. To ease your confusion for the moment, we believe you may be related to a hero we know of that would make several things...complicated. But for right now, we need

to bring Izuku back to Yuuei as a precaution."

Inko jolted, eyes widening as if remembering something important. "Izuku! Gods, you're right, I- he's out running an errand for me. H-he's at the grocery store two streets over, can you-"

"I'll go," Toshinori blurted out, a frankly worrying look in his eyes as he got up and made a break for the door. He had the desperate look of a man that needed answers but needed to ensure his surrogate son, possible grandson of his surrogate mother was safe before he got them. Aizawa let him go.

Somewhere, within the vestiges of One For All, a loud *"HOLY FUCKING SHIT-"* rang through the quiet mind space.

SmallMight: seriously, that plan was so shitty

DustHands: that's what you say every time you fucking shit breath brat

SmallMight: make better plans then!

DustHands: how about you stop being a little shit??

SmallMight: how about this. *I* create a plan for you to incapacitate (NOT murder) a dirty pro hero, and accomplish a task, and you see how well that works, so you have an example

DustHands: are you seriously offering to help a villain commit a crime? you know that's illegal?

SmallMight: legality is flexible. doesn't the only thing that matters is that a bad person gets put away? 'hero,' 'villain,' whatever you want to call them.

DustHands: yeah...whatever. you're a weird brat. fine

SmallMight: you make fun of me for offering, yet you accept the help of a 15yo high schooler

DustHands: you're a fucking weirdo who doesn't belong where you are and you know it.

SmallMight: i don't think it's weird. if everyone worried a little more about people who might hurt them, everyone would be a lot smarter.

DustHands: you seem pretty paranoid for a '15yo high schooler'

SmallMight: well some of us have had to be

Several minutes passed.

SmallMight: and since you seem to take most of my advice, i have some you probably won't like. i wouldn't stay too close to that 'sensei' of yours.

DustHands: excuse me?

SmallMight: everyone who's ever hurt me have been the people who were supposed to take care of me. it always comes from someone close to you first. someone who says they have your best interests at heart. i've only heard you talk about him a few times but it sounds like he has his, not yours, in mind. i can tell that just from how you talk about him and his 'trainings'. my teachers were the first ones who hurt me. it wasn't always degradation, or obvious, or outright. and i'm not telling you what to do. i'm just saying watch. to control the game you have to watch. you have to keep in mind the people who might hurt you might be the ones you think you can trust. watch and see if he takes you seriously, if he listens to your thoughts and plans, and think about what he would say if you wanted to take a path different than what he had planned for you. is he the one who looks out for you? or does he act like you're the one who's a pawn on the chess board? i have good teachers now, ones who i know care because they HAVE helped me, who have cried for me. you can't rely on one person forever, and if you want to be the apex predator, you have to surpass him at some point. and maybe someday that's going to be a battle you have to fight. but most of all, i say listen to your gut. i know you get what i mean.

Another minute passed.

DustHands has disconnected.

Izuku sighed as he shuffled his phone back into his pocket and smiled at the cashier as his turn in line came up. His mother had sent him out for some milk and eggs, and somehow while standing in the queue he'd gotten into another philosophical debate with Tomura. (It felt a bit weird, just calling him Shigaraki, after hearing Kurogiri say "*Young Tomura, it has been three point four hours since I asked you to clean your room*" once.)

The way Tomura talked about his 'sensei' was frankly creepy. It was

like some kind of twisted hero worship.

As he stepped into the street, the faint sound of what he recognized to be shockwaves caught his attention. Squinting as he looked up, he caught barely the hint of a bright yellow blur before a familiar form quite literally slammed into the concrete of the sidewalk in front of him, making several pedestrians scream (and Izuku himself, well, maybe he let out a light screech, just out of surprise).

"A-A-All Might?! What-"

"My boy!" the man cried, sounding like he'd been worried Izuku was *dead* or something. What on earth- Then he was lurching forward, trapping Izuku in a bear hug that was almost suffocating. "Thank goodness you're unharmed- I was so worried- oh, gods."

"A-All Might?" Izuku asked again, unsure, as his eyes flitted to the people around now taking out their phones to take pictures or videos. All Might just trembled, raising a hand to cup the back of his head, and it made him even more worried. "What's going on?"

"I...I need to take you back to your mother," All Might told him, still holding onto him. "We...need to talk."

When Izuku got home, his mother had a certain shoebox on the coffee table, papers spread out. It was one from under her bed, one that had been covered in dust because she never opened it. He only vaguely knew the contents. It involved her original adoption, something that had never really caused her any emotional pain, since she didn't remember much of it. But she had a hand over her mouth, and she was trembling, and Aizawa-sensei was sat beside her with a furrow in his brow and a piece of paper in his hands.

"M-Mom?" he asked, starting to wring his hands together just like she did when she was worried. "Um, what's wrong?"

"Oh." She looked up with glassy eyes, and he honestly couldn't pick apart the emotions on her face. She smiled, but it was more of a nostalgic, sad one. "Izuku, I, well, we...need to talk to you."

Izuku's eyes darted between the three of them. He trusted them, but he was still becoming anxious.

"Um...I kind of lost the milk and eggs. All Might kind of...smashed them when he landed over by the grocery store..."

His mother let out a loud laugh. She wiped at her eyes, looking half disbelieving and half amused. "Honey, I don't care about the groceries. Come...come sit down."

Izuku did, not knowing what to expect.

"So, by any chance, any of you try to off the green bean at the zoo the other day?" Dabi asked dryly, biting into an orange through the skin solely because he knew it would make Compress cringe under his mask and veer an inch away from him where they sat at the bar.

He got a slew of confused looks in return.

"No? No killing attempts?"

"I don't try to *kill* Izuku-kun, just stab him," Toga clarified.

Shigaraki had been hunched over his phone for most of the night. His head raised, though, and he gave Dabi a sullen frown. "What the fuck are you talking about?"

Dabi shrugged. "Someone tried to kill him by shoving him into the exhibit with that lion with unbreakable teeth," he said, nonchalantly. "I looked into it a little. Looks like someone's trying to off him, whoever it is. Probably related to that time he got shot in front of a mall."

"Someone shot him in front of a mall?" Magne wondered, going unnoticed. Tomura's phone cracked in his hands. It was actually an improvement, considering he usually dusted them.

"What the fuck? We're in the middle of a match! I don't have room for some wannabe player three trying to edge their way in!"

"We can't let someone *actually* kill him, right?" Twice asked, looking between the lot of them. "*Who cares, just let him die.* But then I'd have no one to get cinnabuns with!"

"Is the young man all right? I can go and check on him-" Kurogiri began.

Dabi groaned and rolled his eyes. "He's fine, god. I just wanted to know if any of our resident maniacs was the resident maniac at the zoo. Curiosity."

"Well we can't just let some other villains kill him!" Toga demanded,

stomping her foot on the wood. "That's, like, an insult to us! Right?"

Dabi was about to open his mouth and say something about how it didn't matter when Tomura whirled around with a dark look on his face. "That's exactly what it is. They think they can just come in under us and kill someone-"

"We've got dibs," Spinner exclaimed, subtly sharpening the sword Izuku had helped him buy.

"-Call Giran and get him to track these shits down."

Tomura drummed his fingers on the tabletop. Everything that broccoli head had ever said to him was running through his mind on repeat. *Control the game, Tomura.* Well, to him, what that brat had done to those snot-nosed Yuuei students was exactly what Tomura needed to do to these B-listers who thought they could just try to off his player two while they were busy. They needed to know Tomura was in charge. They needed to know not to cross him. This was a prime time to practice what he was trying to do.

...and...perhaps, he would keep it from Sensei, just for now. After all, Tomura should bring a success back without having to be walked through step by step. He would be praised for it later.
Sensei *should* praise him for broadening his influence.

He...would watch. He would prove he could play on the same level as Izuku and his smug little emojis he sent Tomura after every failed kidnapping attempt. Because he was useful, and, well- maybe a tiny (absolutely minuscule) part of Tomura thought it would be less interesting without him around.

...and he would watch.

Sensei really should be proud of him, after all.

Chapter End Notes

> sorry for the impromptu hiatus, not one but now TWO hurricanes came through my area mere weeks apart and I was without any electricity for over a month and without wifi for longer. I still probably won't be updating all that fast but at least I can now! i'm safe and all that, just excited to get back to apex predator!
>
> me: hmm what else can i throw into AP to complicate things. i know. shimura inko

what friends do

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Shouta's eyeballs felt like they were about to roll out of his skull. The burn was dull and stinging at this point, after hours of staring at his computer screen. He had over ten tabs open in his browser at this point. At some point everything had become jumbled together, in his exhaustion; he'd been tracking leads on accounts to try and hunt down villains who might target Midor...well, Izuku, sending emails back and forth with Tsukauchi to get round-the-clock guards posted at the boy's apartment until further notice, looking up various therapy methods to try and counteract the effects of long-term bullying ("*Haha," Mina laughed, sounding vaguely sad as she recounted a story from her middle school years jovially. "Yeah, I got called a bunch of names because of my horns and skin...but don't feel bad, Tsu, being able to clean out your stomach is the coolest thing! It's so useful!" Aizawa watched them, stomach rolled into a tight ball),* reading Hound Dog's reports on Bakugou's progress.

A gentle hand landed on his shoulder as another closed his laptop. Shouta frowned, offended, and Hizashi just gave him a long-suffering if fond stare. "It's past two, Shou," he whispered, making Shouta realize that they now had his latest problem child in the other room they didn't need to wake up. That was another thing he'd been reading. Reports from Hitoshi's doctor and psychiatrist.

"I'll help you more tomorrow. But for now, sleep, okay? I'll bring some Tylenol to bed, and you go check up on 'Toshi," Hizashi, the saint, whispered, before leaning down and pressing a kiss to Shouta's forehead. Some of the tension left his shoulders, and he slumped there in his chair as his husband quietly walked out of their bedroom to head for the kitchen.

After a moment, he stood up and stretched out his aching shoulders. His knees complained at him as he stalked across the room and down the hall, where Hitoshi's door was still slightly ajar. Most nights either Shouta or Hizashi had to move him into bed. It wasn't that he didn't like it- he loved the bed, how comfortable it was, actually having a full set of sheets and a comforter to burrow under, and on Sunday mornings it was a task to get him to leave it, but his sleep pattern was completely disrupted.

It was the result of years of trauma. Dr. Yuu had advised them extensively that they absolutely could not treat it as a case of laziness or 'just needing a nap or two.' After a mind was on alert for so many years, the result of chronic stress was that, now that Hitoshi finally had a safe place he *could* relax, his exhaustion hit him when he didn't expect it. The stressors were gone, but it wasn't some magical fix, and the boy had suffered from chronic insomnia- children from the foster system like him, Dr. Yuu said, more often underwent real, physical damage to their brains. It was like laying a heaping pile of stone onto someone for days and then suddenly lifting it off. They would stumble, limp, probably fall. They couldn't simply start walking perfectly afterwards.

Sometimes it was just being droopy-eyed in the mornings because he was tired even if he'd slept well. Sometimes it was dozing off in English because he *physically couldn't stay awake.* Sometimes it was falling asleep in the middle of homework, or playing a game, things he fully intended on staying awake for. He had been doing better on the medication Dr. Yuu had prescribed, and had started to improve with his therapy, but it was a process. He tended to make homeroom a napping session now, usually falling asleep on either Izuku or Kyouka. The girl had taken a particular shine to him. Apparently they shared similar tastes in music.

Fortunately, there had only been a few serious incidents. Once, when he'd been in the middle of telling Hizashi, who sat at the kitchen bar, about a new cat cafe he'd seen, a smile on his face even if he looked pale and tired, and then he'd been falling, passing out and nearly hitting the kitchen floor if not for Shouta quite literally diving to catch him. A second time when he'd been dragging his feet on the way to a training session, mumbling out about how he was just tired, and ended up tripping, managing to catch himself on a wall before slumping down and falling asleep. Uraraka and Yaoyorozu had been walking with him and nearly panicked, but Aizawa had been nearby, and let the boy sleep with his capture weapon for a pillow through the whole session.

But, even if the incidents were rare, and Hitoshi was slowly starting to improve, both Shouta and Hizashi were insistent on being vigilant. It was why Hitoshi wore a bracelet Recovery Girl and Power Loader had collaborated on that tracked his vitals and told him when he started to crash, and why, if he knew he couldn't make it home or to a certain part of school, Hitoshi went straight to the one sofa in the staff room. It wasn't uncommon nowadays for the other teachers to pass Shouta by while he was working and smile at the tuft of purple hair on the

couch behind him snoring away.

And he would be damned if he let anyone dare call Hitoshi lazy, or said he just needed to *deal with it*. If he heard any staff member make so much as a passing comment he was going to write them up to Nedzu for another round of courses to take on mental trauma and how it impacted underdeveloped minds physically.

When he entered Hitoshi's room, the boy was, predictably, slumped in his own desk chair. His head was lilted to the side, undoubtedly an uncomfortable position that would make his neck ache the next day. A pen was still in his hand as he tried to finish one of the essays for Hizashi's class. He'd left off in the literal middle of a word, and Shouta sighed as he turned the chair, plucked the pen out of his fingers, and gently lifted the boy into his arms to move to bed. Hitoshi *knew* that he could get an extension based on medical necessity, but he still tried so hard to do every little thing to the same standard as all the other students. He tried so *hard* at everything he did.

Shouta pulled the covers up to his neck and brushed a hand through Hitoshi's hair. One night, Hizashi had been in his position, and he'd come out of Hitoshi's room entirely quiet. Solemn-looking. He'd said he'd found a scar from a muzzle. He would know what one looked like.

The only thing we can do is give him love and keep him safe, he'd whispered, staring down at his hands as he sat at the bar. *And show him we won't leave.*

Shouta hoped that he was right. He hoped that he could do the same for all of his kids, even if it was the only thing he could do. If nothing else, for his own sanity.

The break of morning felt weird.

The knowledge that All Might's master, who'd died fighting against the man's very own nemesis, who'd passed on One For All to him, that looked at All Might like her son, was...his own grandmother, that was weird enough. It was weird enough seeing the far-away, nostalgic look in All Might's eyes and simultaneously feeling...distant, like he wasn't actually a part of anything that was- the Shimura family, because there wasn't really one, was there?- and yet longing, too, because he wanted to know about his grandmother, even if she felt more other people's than his.

He was in his room, trying to process it all that night, while his mother continued to talk to All Might and Aizawa-sensei, and he heard her ask in a low voice if All Might would mind being his godfather. He had nearly inhaled on his bottle of water he'd taken with him, heat and embarrassment flooding his face, because he had never...ever had a father. He had always looked at other children with theirs and wondered why he couldn't have had the same thing, and it was a naive little wish that he'd kept hushed up that he looked up to All Might that way, and hearing "*I consider him family already, Inko-san. I...I would be honored, if he's all right with it...*" made tears leak into his eyes. He'd always been a crybaby.

And it was weird being escorted to school by All Might himself, in his overly-large pinstripe suit, gaunt appearance making others avert their eyes as he walked with a hand on Izuku's shoulder. He paused and lingered outside the gate, fiddling with his hands, and All Might looked down at him, looking curious.

"Um...All Might...are you...erm, sure about it? Being my godfather, I mean. I just...I don't want you to feel like you ha-have to, just because I'm..."

"Oh, my boy," Toshinori interrupted him, looking soft as he put his hands on his shoulders. "Please believe me. I cared for you beyond measure before last evening even happened. I...I thought of you as...something like my son, even. You've shown me in so many ways how brave you are, how much you care for others, how forgiving and noble you are- I thought of you as more than just a great successor for One For All. I mean...the other teachers already teased me about being more attached to you than anyone else," he said with a sheepish smile. "I won't deny that my master being your grandmother means nothing, but it just means that- that you are my mother's precious grandson, and I want nothing more than to watch over you for as long as I can."

"You mean it?" Izuku hoped, with a small amount of embarrassment, he didn't sound childish as he bit into his mouth. "I-it's not just...obligation?"

"Of course not." Toshinori leaned down and hugged him, patting the tufts of his hair that refused to lay down.

"Well..." His next question was more...awkward. Izuku didn't really know if he should ask or not, but he felt like he would end up stumbling over his words eventually if he didn't. "Um...what- what should I call you?"

He felt Toshinori pause for a second. "Anything you'd like," he said after that moment, leaning back and smiling. "I only want you to be comfortable."

"Okay." Izuku gnawed on his lip, trying to come up with something, but his brain was drawing a blank. He didn't even *know* what he wanted...or felt comfortable...calling All Might now.

"Goodness, my boy," Toshinori suddenly chuckled, reaching for his tie. "You really are terrible at doing this, aren't you?"

Izuku flushed. "I watch tutorials," he defended weakly, cheeks puffed out, which only made Toshinori snicker quietly again. "My fingers just don't do it right."

"Well, there you are. A proper tie, probably for the first time in school...the class will be shocked!"

"All Might," Izuku whined, clearly pouting as Toshinori laughed and started walking again.

For some reason, Ochako and Momo looked excited when they ambushed him in the hallway ten minutes before class started. Not that being 'late' to homeroom was really a thing anymore.

"It's so cute that your dad walked you to school!" Ochako squealed, bouncing as she applied a few pink hairpins to his hair to match her own. "I've always been so curious."

"Uh- what?"

"We saw you outside the gates with your father," Momo said serenely, smiling at him. "We also saw him when he came to the hospital after the mall incident. He seems very caring."

It took Izuku's brain a few moments to connect the dots. "O-oh- I mean- he's not-" he squeaked, turning red. "I mean, um, he's...not, kinda, but? I mean- uh- he's my, uh, not my biological father, but my godfather, actually."

"Oh," Ochako said, sounding a bit surprised, but not much less excited. "Well, it was still cute! Come on, let's get into class. I think Aizawa-sensei actually has announcements this time..."

"Due to safety concerns, the school has provided personal alarms to

keep on your person at all times should you require assistance outside of campus. If you would like them to be customized to blend into your belongings better, you can go and see Power Loader during any free period. In unrelated news, Midoriya will be undergoing a legal name change, so you may address him as Shimura from now going forward."

Shouto immediately turned in his seat, expression a margin more relaxed than usual, and gave Izuku a look. "We can sit closer in school events now," he said, sounding- daresay- minutely excited. "Since our names are closer together."

Face in his desk, Hitoshi raised a hand to offer a lackluster high-five. "Battered kids club for the win."

Ochako twisted in her own chair to give Izuku a downright devilish grin. He did his best to ignore that.

[cryptkids]

feral rabbit added Monoma Neito

mindjack: ugh why'd you add him

feral rabbit: because he's our friend :D

mindjack: you use 'our' loosely there

lord of darkness: welcome, monoma.

danger with a drill: don't be so prickly, hito, be nice ;)))

mindjack: please literally never use a winky face at me again.

Monoma Neito: what is this?

schemer: hey

Monoma Neito: I think I can guess everyone else, but who are you?

schemer: Really, it's not obvious? shihai, but I guess you wouldn't notice...

Monoma Neito: how did YOU get added here?

feral rabbit: oh, he's a friend of fumi's. and he's pretty cool! and as for what this is, just kind of a chat for a few of us from a few different

classes that made friends! :)

mindjack: it's kind of a fucking weird combination. hence the chat name.

danger with a drill changed Monoma Neito's name to [thievery]

thorns: greetings.

thievery: and you are?

thorns: Togeike Chikuchi. I do not use this chat much. I am simply a friend of Izuku's.

mindjack: she helps him hack and blackmail people

thievery: well, I won't bother unpacking that

mindjack: you really shouldn't

It was honestly an accident.

Things had been going fine all day. Pretty great, even. Considering how dramatic the previous day had been, Izuku was surprised at how easygoing that schoolday felt. Their periods passed in relative quiet, up until battle simulation training. Even Hitoshi seemed more energized than usual, though, so he didn't suspect anything would go wrong.

He'd even gotten some suit upgrades! His suit was still green, but there were black stripes criss-crossed across his torso, an added utility belt, and he'd been able to take off the energy conduction nodes on his legs now that he had a better grasp on One For All. He'd kept his white arm braces, but added on a gold belt buckle and gold stripes up his boots, just to remind him of his grandmother, a little bit. This upgrade also included gloves that were supposed to help him train Mend. When they sensed his vitals start to react negatively, they closed off the palm openings, keeping him from overexerting himself.

He was in one of the buildings when something in the foundation came loose.

All Might had been just about to switch out with Aizawa and Midnight. His time limit was almost up, and he needed an hour in the staff lounge to recuperate. But he turned when he heard the whine of metal on metal, and met Izuku's eyes from where he was in the lower

level, and Izuku felt his stomach drop.

No, no, don't-

But All Might lunged, just as the building came down.

The first thing Izuku heard was coughing. He hadn't passed out, but there was ringing in his ears from the impact of the building collapsing to the ground. It apparently hadn't been rebuilt properly, or it had somehow gotten shaken up from other training on the area, and he heard a loud screech as All Might shuffled aside the pillar he'd caught that would have come slamming into Izuku from above.

Wheezing, the man slid to one knee and pressed a palm against the rubble beside them, trying to look around and make sure nothing else was immediately going to fall apart. But he was already smoking and deflating in front of Izuku's eyes.

"All Might!" he insisted, wrenching himself up from the floor and hurrying over to him. "Your time limit- I would've been fine!- you have to be more careful-"

"I-I'm fine, m-my boy," Toshinori tried to tell him, relaxing to his smaller form, but it made something dark and red near his chest appear more apparent. He coughed, as if he was having trouble breathing, and felt around his chest. "Ugh...I think I need to..."

A hacking wheeze left his lungs. Izuku lunged to catch him before he completely collapsed, and lowered him to the ground, frantically searching for whatever injury he'd acquired.

He felt his heart sink when he saw a piece of metal piping sticking out of the man's chest. It was only protruding a few inches, which meant...which meant it had practically skewered him. Which meant he'd already been losing his form when he rushed in, for Izuku's stupid sake, and he called Izuku reckless! And...

And he might not last long enough for Recovery Girl to...

"A-All Might?" Izuku exclaimed, hesitantly shaking his shoulders as the man's eyebrows furrowed together. His head turned towards him an inch, but his eyes had closed, and he wasn't speaking. "A-A-All Might, please-" *Please don't. Please, please, please-* "T-Toshinori-san...? T-toshi...Dad...please don't-"

Then he remembered. He had *Mend.* He could *do* something.

The voices outside were distant. They wouldn't reach them in time.

"Sorry," Izuku whimpered, taking off his battered gloves, just knowing he was going to get berated later. But he just- he *had* to. He couldn't lose All Might.

He tore some of the costume covering Toshinori's shoulder and grimaced when he saw even more of the wound.

I-I can...I can heal just enough to get him to Recovery Girl, and...I can stop before I damage myself. I can...

He set both hands down.

He never could have expected the overwhelming surge of pain that rushed into his body and brought a scream from his lips.

"Izuku!"

Aizawa whipped around the moment he heard his student start to scream from within the fallen structure. Sure, he had been worried, but they had protocol- and Bakugou and Kirishima had already worked their way out of the other end of the building they'd been in. Since All Might had gone it, he hadn't thought there would be any life-threatening injuries- but that scream-

No, no, Izuku wasn't just *screaming*. He was absolutely howling, like someone had reached into his core and grabbed ahold of his very soul and was ripping it from his body. It sent a chill down his spine and his stomach to churning.

"Tell Cementoss to haul ass over here already!" he nearly snarled to Nemuri, who wasn't at all offended. She herself looked pale as she scrambled for her phone and rang up Nedzu again, telling him their accident had just gone up several levels in danger necessity.

"A-Aizawa-sensei, please let us help!" the urgent voice of Ochako said to his right, making him whip around as harsh breaths left his body. She was staring up at him with glassy eyes, cheeks already wet with tears. "I- I know we aren't professionals, but-"

"Form Rescue Formation B," Aizawa barked out, not caring about regulations. He knew his kids. He knew they could help, and he

wouldn't make them sit there while listening to what sounded like someone *dying*. "Do *exactly* as I say. Kirishima! Bakugou! Watch for any falling rubble and support the squad on the ground!"

"Yes sir!"

Bakugou didn't say anything. He just looked oddly pale as he jerked around and followed his friend.

Firm hands grasped his wrists and wrenched them away from the bloody skin under his palms.

"Oh, my boy, *no*," Toshinori whispered, brokenly, nearly choking on tears as he struggled to sit up and support Izuku's limp form at the same time. He shoved himself against a piece of concrete, pulling Izuku close, and trying to wipe away his tears in vain.

"I-I-I'm sorry," Izuku sobbed, feeling a rush of shame and stupidity and relief all in one, because he would have done it a thousand times but he knew he was so unpracticed with Mend that it was stupid to try and use it on something so serious- but *what choice did he have*. "I'm s-sorry, I th-thought I could jus' do a little, an'..."

He broke down into a fit of coughing. He was wheezing, as if someone was pressing a boot onto his chest, and he scrabbled at his costume with both hands, uselessly trying to find the source of the pain.

It nearly broke Toshinori into pieces. It was the same exact motion he himself had made- made when he reached for his chest, struggling to breathe, feeling phantom pains that never went away- and his chest *ached*, but not in the same way- and now he knew exactly what Izuku had done.

"Shh, it's all right, my boy," he murmured, tears sliding down his cheeks as he pulled Izuku into his lap and held him. This was the worst part. The fact that he could do nothing, that there was no injury he could try to fix, that he could do nothing but sit there as his boy cried in pain.

He wished this Quirk had been one his boy couldn't access. He wished it had never even existed. Because it was the absolute worst kind of Quirk someone like Izuku could get; he could help, and heal, in exchange for only pain, and he would take on any pain for any person if he had to. It was the kind of self-destructing Quirk that could kill him faster than even the stockpiled power of One For All.

Instead of a blessing, it was more of a curse.

Izuku was curled up in one of the beds in Recovery Girl's room, face twisted in pain as he held his chest. It still felt unreal. Unfair. He had given Toshinori a lung, part of the muscle he'd lost around it, and healed the pipe skewering his body.

"I'm sorry, sensei," he mumbled, sounding so defeated it broke Toshinori's heart again. "P-please don't b-be mad at me."

Aizawa was...more emotional than Toshinori had ever seen him. He had been the one who had appeared in a hole in the rubble, finding them curled up while Izuku cried himself into a fitful sleep, and he hadn't even waited for the full story before hauling him up and taking off for Recovery Girl's office. Midnight was outside, holding the students back while Toshinori slipped away. Aizawa himself, he looked like he'd aged ten years, sitting on the other side of Izuku's bed. He quietly slid off his chair so he could kneel beside the cot.

"Problem Child, I'm not mad," he murmured, brushing Izuku's damp bangs away from his sweating forehead. "It isn't your fault."

Izuku's face twisted up. Another sob escaped him, and it made Toshinori wonder how often he'd heard that phrase. *It isn't your fault.*

"He is right, child," Recovery Girl said, in a gentle voice, as she made her way over with a chart in her hand. "This was an unfortunate accident. If you had not done what you had, well, I fear what condition All Might would be in. And I know that this Quirk- it is difficult, and it hurts, but it is amazing what you did. Toshinori, your lung has completely regrown."

"He...he wasn't holding onto me for more than a few minutes at the least," Toshinori breathed, feeling lightheaded. Aizawa looked up at them with a frown. "I stopped him as soon as I was lucid enough-"

"It appears Mend is highly connected to the user's emotional state. I suspect his panic at the prospect of...well, spurred him on."

"What I don't understand is why it healed your lung," Aizawa said. "I thought this Quirk healed new injuries."

"That's another thing," Recovery Girl replied, sounding like she was wondering herself as she pulled over a chair to sit down. "All Might here has been doing some research on the Quirk, and I've been

studying it as well. I am fairly certain it is not how recent the injury is that matters, only that the body still has the capacity to heal it. For example- if one breaks their ankle when they are five, thirty years later their body has healed to the best of its ability. It has reached a state of equilibrium, you might say. All Might- when you were injured, you hardly gave yourself time to rest. You exacerbated your injuries over and over. They never truly healed. For god's sake, you cough up blood every day. Which means-"

A dawning sense of horror came over Toshinori. "Which means he could be able to heal the rest?" he asked, voice quieting to a hush.

Recovery Girl gave him a grim look. "I know it sounds...harsh, Toshinori, but...you may consider-"

"No! Absolutely not! I- I could never inflict this pain upon him," Toshinori choked out, turning away from her and reaching for the hand Izuku had been holding onto his wrist with the entire time again. "I...I cannot. Please."

Izuku's hazy-looking eyes drifted over to him. Like Toshinori had suspected, they looked like he would do it without hesitation. Almost begging. "B-but All Might, I..."

"My boy, no." Toshinori's voice was firm, but pleading as well. He reached down and brushed a hand through his boy's hair. "*Please.* I- I just- I could not live with myself."

He felt guilty at the disappointment in Izuku's eyes. But it was better than seeing him in even more pain, pain he might not be able to recover from so easily.

Aizawa reached over and placed a gentle hand on Izuku's shoulder, trying to be as soft as he could. He looked absolutely miserable, and considering how he already tried to hide pain, it meant he must have felt even worse. "Problem Child, you need to stop worrying about everyone else," he murmured, feeling that brutal sense of exhaustion from the night before hit him again. *Seriously, one day without an incident.* "We are the ones who worry about you. You need to get better, and you cannot destroy yourself. Do you understand?"

"...Y, yes, sensei," the boy murmured after a minute, again making Shouta's arms seize with the urge to find every adult in his life previously and throttle them.

Recovery Girl glanced at the two teachers leaning over the student's

body and snorted softly to herself. It wasn't derisive, only a bit amused. *Hmm. 60/40. I think Toshinori-kun might be gunning for the sixty. Maybe 50/50 at this point.*

Chapter End Notes

let's be real. we all know what the green bean is going to do eventually lmao there is no stopping this self destructive train of selfless recklessness

what friends do II

Chapter Summary

> me: okay i'll give izuku ONE little break and let him heal through the power of cuddling, i've made him suffer enough

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Are you that crusty guy Izuku said needed help hacking some shit?"

The voice that came out of nowhere honestly scared the shit out of Spinner. They had been sitting in the outdoor patio section of a restaurant in their part of town that sold vaguely suspicious footlongs that may or may not have incurred a few health violations when a woman in a hoodie had walked straight up to them, despite their attempts to look incognito, a Starbucks cup in her hand as she stared at Shigaraki, who sat there frozen like a deer caught in headlights. At the table a few paces away, Kurogiri (who had, somehow, come up with the idea to warp most of his head and eyes to the roof above and wear a raincoat with a hood to hide his strange appearance) and Compress tensed as they looked over at them.

Toga stared at the woman curiously. She looked to be college-aged, wearing loose-fitting jeans and a band tee under a zip-up hoodie that was a dark grey. There was a gold piece of chain jewelry connecting each side of the collar that matched the bangle earrings in her ears. There were bags under her eyes as she took a long sip out of her straw.

"Well? Crusty man? Handjob? Mr. Floof? Is that you?"

"Are you plasticbitch2.0?" Toga asked excitedly, standing from her chair and smiling widely behind her kitten-patterned face mask.

"'Mr. Floof'?" Tomura questioned, sounding disgusted, and the woman snorted before slapping a laptop down on their table and sitting down. She shoved Spinner's feet out of the way to make room, ignoring his squawk of indignation.

"Yeah. 'Cuz your hair's all floofy." A few feet away, Compress bit into his lip to keep from smiling at the insulted expression on Tomura's face. "Anyway, 'Zuku said you need help becoming an evil overlord or

some shit?"

Toga, Tomura and Spinner eyed each other for a moment. They weren't exactly intimidated, but the woman's demeanor was certainly odd. They had never met someone who seemed so...*lackadaisical* about shoving their way in and thrusting help upon them.

"Forgive me for asking, young miss," Compress said, leaning back in his seat and taking his hat off. "But you seem very...casual about helping villains like us. Do you not worry about the legality of what you may end up helping with?"

The girl snorted audibly. "Buddy, you've got no idea how much illegal shit Izuku does, let alone how much *I* do. We could probably both already get arrested without *you* scrubs helping out." For a moment they sat there in silence. "Anyway, he told me someone put a hit out on him and that pissed me off so I figured that, since you people are better equipped to go deal with it than I am, I'd help him out and help *you* out like he asked. Do we have a deal or not?"

Tomura's eyes flitted over to Kurogiri, who had retracted his head at this point, and Compress, who stared back silently. They were giving him the go-ahead. The silent assurance they would back up the choice he made.

"Fine," he said, slightly raspy, as he hunched over in his chair to fold his arms on the tabletop.

"We should introduce ourselves, then," Toga said brightly, taking off her mask to smile. '*plasticbitch2.0*' appeared unbothered by the bit of blood in her teeth. "I'm Toga Himiko! That's Spinner, and Mr. Compress, and Kurogiri. And this is Shiggy!"

"My name," Tomura spat, "is not. Shiggy!" He tried to regain some semblance of professionalism as he looked back to the hacker Izuku had sent to them, gritting his teeth. "Shigaraki Tomura."

The woman grinned at him. "You can just call me Hana."

She held out her hand. But for Tomura, the world came to a chilling pause for just a moment.

Hana-

Tenko, Tenko, look at me!

Hana-

He yanked his hands off the table, like she would burn him, and put a glare onto his face. "Whatever. Let's get started."

"Sure, Mr. Floofy."

"Shigaraki."

"Floofy."

"*Shigaraki!"*

As soon as visitors were allowed, one Todoroki Shouto had zipped into the nurse's office and immediately climbed into bed with Mid-Shimura. That was going to be a hard change to make, mentally. Honestly, Shouta had started to think of his student by just Izuku- he was starting to think of all of them by just their first names- and he had to bite his tongue occasionally when speaking with the other teachers to maintain his professionalism and keep himself from saying something like *Denki electrocuted himself again trying to charge Tsuyu's phone because she was waiting on a message from her mother about her aunt in the hospital and may have started bawling if she missed something important because of something as stupid as a dead battery*.

Some of the pain eased from Izuku's face as he curled into Shouto's side. "He said my ice helps," the boy told the three of them, the furrow in his brow the indication of how worried he was. "The last time it happened."

"I suppose it would," Recovery Girl said, sounding thoughtful. "He does have a slight fever, after all."

The door flew open as Ochako and Tenya came bursting in, panting, probably having run straight over from the grounds after Midnight escorted them back. "Is he okay?" Ochako blurted out, face twisted up in worry.

"Sensei! What is his condition? I heard that All Might was injured and Izuku healed it- is he all right? Was it serious? How long will he be incapacitated? Is-"

Shouta held up his hand to stop Tenya's worried rambling. His brother did the same thing, when it came to Tenya being hurt.

Ochako caught sight of Toshinori, in his smaller form, and stood up ramrod straight, squeaking. "Oh, hi Shimura-san! Sorry, I didn't see you there! Nice to see you!"

Toshinori let out a wheezing cough that, for once, wasn't accompanied by blood. "Th-thank you," he said, weakly, which would be funny later when their student wasn't passed out in a bed. He looked thoroughly embarrassed, too much to correct her and tell her his name wasn't Shimura.

"Everyone, please calm down." Recovery Girl came wheeling back over with her medical tray where a laptop sat, chuckling. "He is going to be just fine. However, there is a hypothesis I would like to test. Shouto-kun, would you mind moving for a moment?"

Shouta would have laughed at Todoroki's *Yes, I would mind* frown if he was alone. However, the boy obediently moved off the bed, making Izuku wince again.

"Ochako-chan, would you mind taking his place?"

"Of course!" The girl would probably do anything to help. She had no qualms about practically diving onto the bed and cuddling up with her friend, winding her arms around his shoulders. Some of the tension eased from his face again.

"Hmm."

Shouta and Toshinori both looked over at Recovery Girl, squinting at her computer screen. Squinting, Shouta tried to make out some of the readings. "What is it?"

"Well, it's just a guess, but his vitals appeared calmer when Shouto-kun was holding him. His temperature went down a degree, as well. Then the same happened with Ochako-chan, though I am sure Shouto-kun's ice Quirk will help with the temperature aspect a tad more."

"Are you saying it helps his condition if someone holds him?" Toshinori asked, sounding hopeful. Shouta could read him like a book. He still felt guilty, and his palm went to his chest every time Izuku held where his lung was hurting, as if wishing the pain was back where it was supposed to be. It also made him feel a bit like shit- how had he not noticed his own colleague was walking around with pain that intense every day? Why didn't All Might ever *say* anything?

"That's what I am thinking, yes. There is already scientific research

about the positive effects of physical affection on things such as injury healing and chronic pain, so it's not that out-there of an idea- and I am hoping it might be the saving grace of this...*aspect*...of his Quirk," Recovery Girl said, giving the two teachers a pointed look over the other students' oblivious heads. "Perhaps it has to do with the other function- Tactile- that involves boosting others' capabilities through touch."

It was either an aspect of Mend or Tactile, or somehow the two working in tandem, that was causing it. Shouta could read between the lines well enough. Even so, he didn't even care- he just wanted there to be some way to dampen the drawback to this Quirk, because his student was too self-sacrificing to not kill himself with it.

Ochako sounded overjoyed. "Then we can just take turns holding him until he feels better!"

Recovery Girl gave her an amused smile. "Yes, however, you children do need to get back to class. I am sure, ahem, *Shimura-san* and Aizawa can stay with him for the moment." Toshinori flushed and looked away at the woman's teasing.

The kids looked disappointed, but they had already missed a full period. "She's right. You three get back to the homeroom," Shouta ordered, relaxing back into his seat by Izuku's bed. "You can come visit him again when school lets out, I assure you."

They all looked reluctant to leave- especially Shouto, who was downright frowning- but they obeyed, filing out of the room. Toshinori barely had time to heave out a sigh and rake a hand across his face before Recovery Girl reached out and poked him with a thermometer, making him yelp.

"All right, Toshinori, come along. I need to examine you and you know it."

"Wh-what? But I'm fine!"

"Child, you regrew a *lung*, not to mention some of the muscle around it. Don't make me drag you into the exam room."

Toshinori looked like he was nearly pouting as he stood up, but Shouta knew why he was reluctant to leave. Izuku was still mostly asleep on the bed, but his hands were reaching out for the empty space where Ochako had been, clutching the empty sheets instead.

"I've got him," he rumbled, getting out of his chair, and Toshinori looked mildly grateful before leaving.

Doing something like this would have felt awkward- a bit like pulling teeth, maybe- before Shouta had gotten this class. But, now, sitting down on the edge of the bed and reaching out a hand to settle on Izuku's shoulder felt as natural as when he put Hitoshi into bed at night or took the tangles out of Hizashi's hair when he was rushing out the door and had missed a spot brushing. "Problem Child, you awake?"

The boy's eyes creaked open. "Hi, sensei," he mumbled, looking miserable. Sighing, Shouta settled himself further onto the bed and pulled the child into his lap, carding a hand through his hair. The relieved, stressed sigh he released made Shouta's chest feel tight again, like it had when he'd had to sit in on the examination of Shouto's case and seen the evidence photos of his scars.

"You're all right," he mumbled, wondering if Shimura Inko was sitting at home worried after getting another call about her son hurting himself. He wondered if he knew any heroes who would be interested in moving. It wouldn't hurt to have more protection around, would it? "I've got you."

At some point, Nedzu himself came to retrieve Shouta from the office. He was smiling, but it was his fake, angry smile that was the furthest thing from manic, which worried him. Shouta left Toshinori curled up with Izuku like a pair of koalas before following Nedzu to his office, frowning the whole way.

"Sir? What's this about?"

"The simulation, Shouta," Nedzu replied, which was also bad- him using his first name. It was always his way of telling someone that a conversation was serious. "Would you like to see this?"

He clicked a button on a remote that made a monitor rise from his desk and show a holographic view of the building they'd been training in. Several glowing red points caught his attention.

His back went ramrod straight. Shouta's nails dug into his knees where he sat on the couch, and he felt a hot fury flow through his veins that somehow put everything he'd felt before this to shame.

"Someone weakened the supports in this building before the class even

began. It was meant to collapse from the start."

"Correct," Nedzu replied crisply, pressing another button and letting the hologram disappear. "Which means someone infiltrated Yuuei itself to try and kill Izuku-kun, and now that we know of his lineage, the possibility of just who did this is concerning."

Shouta was in danger of making tears in his trousers. He was still staring at the dark monitor; though the office was quiet, he found it felt like it had become unbearably noisy, like a train was bearing down on him. Every tiny movement, from the sway of the string on Nedzu's lamp that controlled the bulb to the rustle of the curtains every so often, felt like it may be some shadowed enemy.

An enemy he wanted to kill.

Shouta was a Hero, and he'd wanted to become one to save people. To help them. There were few, few, times in his entire life he'd wanted to kill- he never wanted him to step off that ledge. But he wanted to *kill* whoever had done this.

They had put his entire class in danger. What if it had been Mina and Koji inside, instead of Katsuki and Eijirou, who didn't have the same capabilities to blast out of rubble? What if it had been Kyouka, her earjacks ripped off by broken pipes and brick and blood spraying as she cried- what if it had been Mezo, who would push himself until he broke to shield whoever was under him- what if it had been Toru, who they might have taken hours to find if she fell unconscious- what if it had been Fumikage, and he lost control in the darkness and hurt himself or one of his friends- what if it had been Denki, who was claustrophobic- what if it had been *Hitoshi, his son, whose Quirk would be of no use to him-*

Shouta was not losing a student.

"Aizawa-kun, please don't damage your hands," Nedzu pointed out softly, setting a teacup on the table. Shouta broke out of his furious haze, focusing on the soft clink to narrow in on, and made himself release his knees. His hands were aching.

"We need to find them," he said, lowly.

Most of the accounts who had taken up Izuku's hit- they were just petty thugs, or minor villains. They wouldn't have been able to pull this off. Infiltrating Yuuei's security? Someone higher up had to have gotten involved.

Nedzu took a sip of his tea.

"Interestingly enough," he said, tone lighter than usual, though not in a happy one. "Upon tracking down a few of these accounts, they had very...odd reactions. A few turned themselves in and pleaded guilty for a reduced sentence. Two of them wouldn't say anything, they appeared so afraid. And, well...there is an unfortunate amount that were dead when we found them."

Shouta froze. His eyes widened slightly as he raised his gaze to his boss, frowning. "Are you saying-"

"Yes, it does appear that someone else is tracking these people down. Someone who's not shy of killing them, it appears. However, due to the fact they are not killing *all* of them-"

"They're trying to send a message."

"Precisely. I've been doing more research into the forum the hit was posted on in the first place." Nedzu pulled up a small screen from his watch, looking fascinated as he tapped away. "There are many parts to the criminal underworld, Aizawa- you know that better than anyone. But, it looks as though anyone who saw that posting is aware that someone is, metaphorically, saying- *back off*. Someone taking territory, you might say. Their account is nearly untouchable. Even I haven't been able to get into it, and it has no connection to any physical place- trying to suss out the location of the poster just keeps rerouting me to every other server in Japan and some outside of it. The name isn't too revealing. All it says is...*Ambition."*

"What, so we have a possible villain going by Ambition, for some reason trying to ward people away from a high school student?"

"I know. It's quite strange. This doesn't even take into account who was able to infiltrate our system in the first place. However-"

Nedzu paused. It was unlike him. Shouta narrowed his eyes.

"Around six last night, there was a use of our line with the Hero Commission's server. It was only to request a copy of the Sports Festival security review that they assisted with, for training and review purposes, however."

"It's the only activity out of the norm."

"Yes."

"Which means that someone in the Hero Commission is involved in this."

"Unfortunately."

Shouta reached up and rubbed his forehead.

Their legal department was going to have a hell of a week.

All Might did not even look surprised when Nedzu told him.

"I know I may seem behind the times, sometimes," he said, sounding tired as he sat there. "But I am not unaware that the Public Safety Commission can use...dirty...methods. It is something that has frustrated me for a long time, being that I am the Symbol of Peace, but cannot do anything to stop them when there is no proof. I rescued a young girl, once, one with a powerful Quirk- she was an orphan; her parents had died in a villain attack, but she could manipulate the air around her, to the point of suffocating those in range. And someone wearing a Commission uniform was waiting right outside her hospital door. I took it upon myself to have her placed with a good family, told them they were now my personal friends, and kept in contact, because I just- I *knew*. And I hated that was all I could do. Why do you think I was so insistent that my boy come here, to Yuuei? Not because it is my alma mater- it has the largest legal department of any school in the country- its graduates have the least trouble with the Commission in their careers at all."

Aizawa had never thought All Might was *stupid*- not at all. But he did feel, for a moment, that he'd underestimated him some, and *he* felt a little stupid for that.

But it- above all else- meant All Might, too, would go to any lengths to protect the kids, and that was what mattered.

"Man, you had to kill another one? Too bad."

"You're real comfortable with murder," Spinner pointed out, eyeing Hana suspiciously as she sat at the same cafe joint typing away at her laptop. Tomura was sulking off to the side, trying to ignore the sounds of Twice and Toga arguing over cards.

"You did real good with the one before that, though," Hana said, ignoring him. "Guy had a lot of dirt on him. I think he shit his pants

when you brought it up."

"What matters if that people know not to cross me," Tomura muttered, planting his feet on the chair in front of him and glaring out into the rain beyond the patio's cover. "If they don't listen, that's their fault."

"I bet Izuku could've intimidated him into silence."

"Oh, *son of a-"*

Yaoyorozu Momo was tired.

Training that day had been a disaster. The building had collapsed, and then Izuku's screaming...she had felt sick for the whole day after, even though they'd been able to visit after school and had started a cuddle pile on the boy's bed that had him smiling for the first time in hours. She felt guilty, even though she hadn't caused it, about the whole thing- from how hurt Izuku had gotten, to how upset Aizawa-sensei had looked to have to let them perform a rescue operation when they weren't fully trained because they *had* to, even though they were supposed to be somewhere safe, somewhere to learn, to how tired her class was as they all went home.

She stepped into her house and nudged her shoes off on the mat by the door. It was large and grand, like a mansion, her classmates said, but it was just home to her.

"I'm home," she called.

"Good evening, Momo," her uncle's voice called from the study. He'd been coming over more often, since his work wasn't as busy- she thought it was nice, since her father got to spend more time with him. All the members of her family were so busy, after all. "How was school?"

Momo walked further into the house and took a left. Down the hall a bit, she stepped into the study- the extra one, her father's was upstairs- and smiled at Yaoyorozu Eiichii, who sat at the computer with his hands still poised over the keyboard. He looked like her father, with dark hair and eyes, but his smile had always looked different. He claimed he got it from their father, while Momo's father got it from their mother. "I know you said you had that simulation the other day," her uncle continued, smile growing wider.

"It didn't go so well," Momo replied, shoulders slumping. "There was

an accident, I'm afraid."

"Oh?" He raised an eyebrow, looking mildly concerned. "Was anyone hurt?"

"Fortunately not badly. One of my classmates was quite...injured, though," Momo said, eyes drifting to the floor as her expression dampened. "It was Izuku- I've told you about him before, remember? But Recovery Girl assured us he would be better within the week, so I am glad for that."

"Ah. Well, that's a shame. You'll pass on my well wishes, won't you? I'm sorry it happened."

She brightened slightly. "Thank you, uncle. Are Father and Mother home yet?"

"Ah, I'm afraid not." Eiichii grinned as he stood, waving her off. "They're still at the gala. There's takeout in the fridge, so don't worry about dinner, Momo. I'll be here for a while- I'm afraid I got some last-minute work."

"Oh! Well, don't let me disturb you- I know your work with the Commission is important!"

He looked at her and smiled again, eyes twinkling.

"Thank you, Momo."

Sensei didn't sound proud.

"I'm interested as to why you're seemingly wasting your time on these small pursuits, Tomura. Don't you think your time would be better spent elsewhere?"

Tomura stared at the dark screen that familiar voice was emanating from. "I'm making a name for myself, Sensei," he said, thinking carefully about what he should say. "These people shouldn't be edging in on tasks that are mine to do."

"And what might that be?" He could feel the disapproval in Sensei's tone, and it made something along his skin feel chilly. "Going after random small-time criminals isn't worth your time, Tomura."

He gritted his teeth before forcing himself to say his next sentence.

"It's something I want to do."

There was a moment of silence.

"Well, you may do as you like, Tomura," Sensei finally said, in the tone of voice one would use with a child. "But keep in mind you are meant for bigger things. You need to spend your time preparing for the future." *And what exactly does that include, Sensei?* "You are my successor. You have a legacy to live up to. Remember that."

The screen turned off.

Tomura sat there, on the floor of his room, and just breathed for a minute. He thought back to Izuku. (*Since when had he started thinking of the green brat by name?)* He thought back to how, somehow, Izuku was the one who was leveling up. How he'd been leveling up while Tomura hadn't. How he'd *made Tomura level up.* He thought back to what he said.

Sensei says he cares about me, but he's never here.

Sensei says I need to think about the future, but he isn't showing me what that future is.

Sensei says I should prepare for something, but he never says what it is.

Everyone who's ever hurt me have been the people who were supposed to take care of me.

Tomura didn't think his Sensei was the mentor in this game. The mentor always showed the protagonist the proper way, then let him go down the path himself. Sensei was supposed to be the king of evil, wasn't he? At some point, wouldn't he had to have been a level one just starting out? *Starting out like this?*

Did he not want Tomura becoming like him?

Did he not want Tomura taking that position from him?

Tomura...had a lot to think about.

He jumped when something knocked on his door.

"Young Tomura," the voice of Kurogiri floated through. "I believe that trio of villains you were interested in speaking to are downstairs."

Tomura let out a slow breath.

Watch and see if he takes you seriously, if he listens to your thoughts and plans.

"Kurogiri," he called out, which came out quieter than intended because of how raspy his voice had gotten. "Can you- come in here?"

There was a brief pause before the handle turned and Kurogiri ducked under the doorframe to step inside. He saw Tomura sitting on the floor and stared at him for a moment. He shut the door, took a step closer, stopped. Waited.

"Kurogiri," Tomura said, hating how he sounded, because his throat felt tight and he was afraid. *Afraid*. Afraid of the answer. "If someone told you to...kill me, would you do that?"

"What?" The man sounded surprised, and surely hadn't been expecting that sort of question. "Young Tomura, that is ridiculous. Of course I would not do that. I am to watch over you."

"Okay." He paused to scratch at his neck, but stopped, not wanting to have to put on more band-aids. "What if Sensei told you to kill me?"

The silence, this time, was almost deafening.

"...I am to watch over you, Tomura."

Tomura let out a breath he didn't know he'd been holding.

"Okay," he said, quietly, and got up to go downstairs. Kurogiri reached out and fixed part of his hair that was tangled into a curl that was sticking up. It was something he'd done before, but Tomura just stood there, thinking.

He'd watch. He'd listen. He'd keep thinking.

Chapter End Notes

yall thot i forgot about hana, didn't u?

Revenge Party

Chapter Summary

also titled: aizawa fucking LOSES it

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

-Many weeks prior-

Midoriya Hisashi had a shit life ever since he turned twenty-two.

When he was twenty-two, he got married. He had a young, beautiful wife he'd known since high school who cooked and cleaned and always made sure he had dinner when he came home even if she was busy with playing at school. She wanted to do legal work, all right, that was fine- just as long as she wasn't busy. And she finished, got her degree, things were fine- but all she ever fucking talked about was having a child.

Can't you imagine it, Hisashi? she'd say with a smile, a twinkle in her eyes. *A cute little baby boy! Or a girl! I mean, I would accept them no matter what- do you think they would have my hair, or yours?*

I don't care, had sat on his tongue.

She just never stopped. She bought shit like baby clothes and blankets and kept them in her closet, wasting money. Hisashi didn't want children. He'd never wanted children. Why would anyone? They just weighed one down- they were a crying, dirty mess that screamed for attention until they turned eighteen and got thrown out to fend for themselves. When they'd started going steady and Inko had asked him if he wanted kids he'd waved her off with a *yeah, yeah, sure, eventually,* just to avoid the topic, but he was regretting it later. All Inko talked about was babies. She picked out names. She was dead-set on Izuku for a boy, and Nanako for a girl. She talked about the brat like it already existed. *I bet little Izuku would love this, don't you think?* She started becoming convinced she would have a boy, like she had some sixth sense or some shit, and spoke of 'Izuku' for two years before the brat was born.

Hisashi just didn't get it. They could use their money on them, go on vacations, go out drinking and for steak, have fun. He didn't want to

settle down like some homebody with a picket fence. Before he knew what had happened, he'd started to hate his marriage. He hated how Inko let herself go and started to put on a few more pounds. How his old buddies from school had wives that still looked nineteen and were posting pictures from Europe about their latest trips. How his work pals went out for drinks every night. So he started going with them. He'd drink, go to work, ignore Inko's rambling when he got home...honestly, when the brat was born, he wasn't even sure if it was his. Inko and him- they still had sex, sometimes, but Inko didn't like it when she could smell alcohol on him, and usually turned in early to avoid him.

And god, he hated that kid.

He took completely after Inko. Green hair, green eyes, a soft face. He didn't look a lick like Hisashi. After he was born, it was *Izuku, Izuku, Izuku.* Hisashi didn't get any attention. The kid was all Inko was concerned with. She left bed every night to hold him when he cried; stayed home more to take care of him; spent money on clothes to dress him up in for photos.

Hisashi couldn't help but avoid him. And he was angry, and he drank more, and he couldn't help but start to hate his *'son'* too.

The first time he slapped the kid, it was just to get him to shut up after he'd been crying. Inko wasn't home. Hisashi made sure the brat wouldn't say a word. And if he did it more often, that wasn't worth anything- everyone got knocked around a little as a kid. It was discipline. Hell, he'd gotten spanked as a kid and he'd turned out fine.

Except that night, when he finally had enough and snapped, and kicked the little shit away from him- he was still so desperate for attention, even though Hisashi had tried to make it clear he didn't like him, and had been crawling towards him- and tried to burn him, Inko had gone insane. He remembered her screaming as clear as day, calling him all kinds of vile names, throwing things at him, even though this was all *her* fault really- they'd fought, and the police had gotten there, and all she'd been able to do was sob about *Izuku, Izuku, he hurt Izuku.* Where had his wife that loved him gone? Where was the wife that valued *him* above everything else?

So he got thrown into prison, and he spent about twelve bitter years in there. Originally, he'd gotten a twenty-year sentence, but- since he was so well-behaved, and learned all the lingo and shit they threw around in the programs they made him attend- *I know what I did was*

wrong now. It was narcissistic. I would gaslight my wife for things that weren't her fault. It was abuse- he got parole.

He got out, and he went out for a drink and laughed bitterly when he saw what was on the television.

His fucking brat in the Yuuei Sports Festival. His *Quirkless* brat in the Yuuei Sports Festival.

Hisashi couldn't find the energy to give two shits about what that kid did. But, in his drunken haze, he pulled out his phone and wondered if he had any of his old contacts left, and hopped on those forums he used to lurk about looking for ways to get more money when Inko spent their savings on fucking baby clothes, and laughed as he put up a job posting. No one would actually take it, he figured. Yuuei students were pretty well-guarded, he assumed, anyway. But if the little shit wanted to act like he was some big shot now, why not? It'd be a great practical joke.

He went back to his shitty one-room apartment that night to sleep it off, and didn't think about it again.

-Some weeks later-

Midoriya Izuku was an interesting case.

The Commission kept an eye on *all* prospective students from the various academies around Japan. Sometimes it was to scout out new recruits, heroes to keep an eye on, or to simply catalog the up and coming Pros for various disaster plans. Who would work best where, who could fight what kinds of villains. But a smaller part of their supervision was something that went unspoken of, most of the time. They kept an eye out for students who might create *problems*.

The activist type. Those who spoke about the Commission critically. Those who seemed too sympathetic to villains. Kids who graduated Yuuei and thought they were some kind of revolutionaries, harder to get rid of down the line because they would become martyrs to the public.

Midoriya Izuku had come blazing out to make a name for himself in the Sports Festival. The Commission immediately took note of him, how powerful he might become. More importantly, however, they took note of something more dangerous than his powers: his brain.

He made a plan to win the Festival when he was only a first-year. From what Eiichii had heard, there were even students who were afraid of him. From what his niece said, he 'took care' of problems, even going so far as to help get a student expelled. That wasn't necessarily a bad thing in and of itself- the Mineta boy sounded like more of a problem than anything, anyway, if he became a Pro, that would require a whole PR team- but the fact he'd done it was what caught Eiichii's attention.

He was smart. Intelligent. He was the type to look into things and poke around where he shouldn't. He was smart enough not to rely on his Quirk alone- he had gone up against the Hero Killer as a first year.

That, in itself, wasn't enough to have him removed. However, it was Sotaru who took notice of him next.

He had only ever spoken to her via online meetings, but she was Hawks' handler. She had noted some concerning changes in behavior regarding their 'golden boy,' changes that conveniently happened when Midoriya Izuku became his intern. Hawks even became protective of him- he had refused to send the Commission files on his interns, saying it was Yuuei policy. (Which it was, but Hawks should have ignored that.) That entire ordeal with Endeavor- that had also happened shortly after Midoriya made close contact with the Todoroki boy. He had affected their number two and number three, if in different ways.

He had contacted Sotaru, at some point, for a consult. At some point, they'd discovered the boy's role in the original USJ attack, and he let her sharper eyes rove over the intel their information department had compiled.

It all became worse when it appeared he had more than one Quirk.

Sure, Eraserhead had an explanation at the Sports Festival that might have fooled most. Sure, it was possible for Quirks to manifest in more than one way- take the Todoroki boy, for example. But Midoriya? His powers functioned in far too different ways to simply be the same Quirk. On one of his regular requests for training simulation reviews, Eiichii had gone through some records, and sure enough, he found notes from the medical office about some kind of healing Quirk. He heard his niece mention, while she was on the phone with one of those friends of hers, how he could boost others' powers.

It didn't paint a good picture.

The possibilities were as such: he was either born with multiple powers, making him an extremely dangerous anomaly, had some kind of Quirk that let him absorb others' abilities, or- he could steal them.

He was another All For One.

True, the real All For One had supposedly been killed by All Might years ago- but he had terrorized the country for decades.

Ultimately, Eiichii had to choose to be precautionary. Midoriya Izuku simply appeared to be too much of a threat to let alone. If he had been younger, they could have trained him, molded him for a greater purpose- but he was solidly in Yuuei's clutches, and even worse, was the personal protege of All Might, who had no doubt instilled some nonsense about always saving everyone, no matter what, in him, which meant he would never look the other way if he saw the Commission do one thing wrong. If he could steal Quirks, he may even target those in the Commission he deemed dangerous. He'd think himself the next Symbol who needed to take down any villain he saw.

It was a shame.

It was also a surprise when he went online and found someone had placed a hit on him. It was a small one, barely even noticeable, but someone didn't like the boy, apparently. Still, it provided Eiichii a good opportunity.

After receiving approval- *it really was a shame, if only we had found him sooner, but he just posed too much risk, with all things considered combined-* Eiichii hacked his way into the account that posted the job and upped the money offering.

Like magic, the views started going up.

Aizawa was, in a word, going to explode.

Izuku had been placed on medical leave for the rest of the week. He'd been allowed back into homeroom, so he wouldn't miss out *entirely* on important materials with finals coming up, but only after a sofa had been placed inside by the bulletin board and with Shouto and Ochako wrapped around him the whole time. Yes, Aizawa told Ectoplasm, it was absolutely educationally necessary that Ochako spend her time decorating Izuku's shaggy hair with flower pins instead of doing the exercises on the board. Just look at the boy. His hair was a mess. It had been growing and growing since he got into school.

On his nights, though, when his students were home and he knew Izuku was safe under guard, he went looking.

The amount of criminals who'd taken up the hit on Izuku had dwindled fast. Whoever had been hunting them down, they were damn efficient, and Aizawa only had a few left to try and find. The ones he had, however, were what was making him so angry tonight.

Because they were Heroes.

Four of them, grown men who'd taken it upon themselves to take up the title of a Pro Hero, who made extra cash under the table by taking up illegal jobs- *including trying to murder Aizawa's student and putting his kids in danger.* It was a hero team with an elemental theme- he honestly didn't know, or care, what their Quirks were, and had barely dropped into the large, empty warehouse he'd tracked them to before activating his own Quirk.

Down below, they were standing in tense positions, as if readying for a fight, before he descended upon them.

"What the fu-" the leader yelped, right before Aizawa's fist smashed in his nose. There was a scream to his right, and he whipped around with his capture weapon and seized the one who'd taken the brunt of broken glass from his entrance. He swung the man into the third, then the fourth, then released him and shoved the leader into the middle, so they were all in his sight, proceeding to beat the ever loving shit out of them.

"Stop it!" one of them cried, trying and failing to summon what was probably wind. "What the fuck?! Eraserhead, is that fucking you-" He choked on his tongue when Aizawa kicked him in the gut, and then vomit dribbled out of his mouth.

"You fucking traitor!" one of them roared, pointing at him. "There are real villains right there, and-!"

Aizawa paused.

He glanced over his shoulder. Like they'd been watching a 'lion tears sheep to shreds' spectacle at the zoo, several figures he didn't recognize- and one he did recognize- were staring at him, looking like puppets who'd had their strings cut. There was Shigaraki- he knew that for sure- with his hands out, but he was frozen, blinking rapidly as he tried to take in what was going on. A man in, for some reason, a top hat and gaudy yellow coat- entirely too fancy for fighting- was

beside him, hand holding three marbles, but slightly limply, as if he'd been ready to use them but then disappointed he couldn't. There was someone with a mutation Quirk, and a young-looking girl with knives in her hands, and a man with dark hair that seemed familiar, for some reason, and three more farther back, one that looked like the warper they knew the League had.

He turned back to snarl in Pro Hero Hurricane's face. "Shut. The fuck. *Up.*"

"Wha-"

"*Did I not tell you to shut the fuck up?"* Aizawa screamed, hair floating as he shouted. Hurricane cringed and cowered in his grasp as Aizawa held him by the collar. "I see two other villains, and several bystanders. I will deal with the villains in the order they are presented to me, which right now, is you-" He paused to glance at the wind user. "*You-"* Then the other two, in succession. "*You, and you! Then* whoever else is here! Do you understand me?"

"What the fuck did we do?!" Tornado- he was pretty sure the man's alias was Tornado- screeched out.

"You," Aizawa seethed, tossing Hurricane into Blockbuster (wasn't there a fire one too? Flamebreak or something? Whatever, he would go with that-) and then nailing Tornado in the eye with his heel, making someone behind him let out an audible *ooh, that had to hurt-* "Went on an illegal site and agreed to take a job to kill *my student,* a *fifteen year old child,* and you put every single person in my class at risk by *you-*" He turned to Blockbuster again, pulling his fist back and bludgeoning the man's already bruised face. "-Breaking the foundation of their training building, and trapping them in rubble. *Do you want to explain that?"*

Coughing through blood, Hurricane stumbled to his feet and held up his hands, either trying to keep Aizawa away or trying and failing to use his Quirk again. "L-look, Eraserhead, you've got the wrong guys, we-"

"*No I do not.*"

"Look, sorry if your class had an accident-"

"Do not even PRETEND to be apologetic, you piece of *swine-*"

"Okay, sorry if I don't sound like a bleeding heart! What, you want me

to cry over every random sixteen year old that gets a papercut?"

"*YES,"* Aizawa roared in his face, kicking him in the knee and ignoring his cry of pain as he doubled over. "You are a *Pro Hero,* and *as a Pro Hero,* you should be concerned with *EVERY* child that may need your help- no, *in general- AT ALL TIMES- FOR ANY ISSUE.*"

"Every-?!"

"*EVERY SINGLE ONE,* whether they are five or fifteen. You have an *OBLIGATION,* and *you signed up for this*! I don't care if you so much as find a stray *cat* in an *alley*, you little shitstain- *you stop and help it! Do you understand me?!*"

Hurricane tried to make a weak swipe at him. Aizawa hit him again, his capture weapon floating around him like some sort of extraterrestrial lifeform, and proceeded to *keep* beating the shit out of them because they were still fighting back.

He ended up breaking Blockbuster's leg, shattering Flamebreak's elbow, giving Tornado a host of contusions and a concussion, and probably breaking both of Hurricane's arms. More than one of them was crying by the time they gave up and collapsed on the floor, half-tangled in capture weapon, and Aizawa took a few moments to calm himself down, which involved taking deep breaths and giving Blockbuster- the one who controlled earth and cement and the one who'd de-stabilized the building at Yuuei- an extra kick to the ankle that had him crying harder.

"Yeah, well, you're a hypocrite," Tornado eventually sobbed out through the blood running down his face, raising a shaky hand and pointing it at the girl Aizawa had seen. "H-help every child, didn't you say that? Well, she's a villain, and she's what, fifteen, too? Aren't you going to help HER, Eraserhead?"

Aizawa, in his protective rage-fueled carnage, froze and turned around, squinting at the girl who suddenly squeaked and hid behind a man standing beside her wearing a mask. "You," he barked out. "How old are you?"

Giggling, she leaned out from behind the man and gave him a seemingly shy wave. "I'm sixteen, Mr. Eraserhead."

Shigaraki seemed to have no issue with Aizawa talking to any of them. He was still just staring at him, looking half amazed and half almost...intimidated.

"*What?"* Aizawa nearly snarled, whipping his head around to who she'd hid behind. "How old are you?"

"Uh..." Clearly not expecting to be singled out, the man- the mutation Quirk one- rubbed the back of his head, looking awkward. "...Nineteen?"

Aizawa turned his gaze on the next one near them, looking half-feral. "I-I'm an adult, to be clear," Compress coughed into his hand. "I do try to keep an eye on them..."

"Dabs is only like twenty-something," the girl whispered, looking at Shigaraki. "How old are you, Shiggy? Aren't you like twenty?"

Aizawa felt like he was going to break. No. He'd already broken. "Is the League of Villains made up of fucking teenagers?" he shouted, tightening his capture weapon and making a few of the Pros he had tied up shriek. Suddenly, several things made sense: how ineffective they were, for one, and how much of a ragtag group they seemed to be. Seeing as he'd claimed to be the adult in this scenario, he turned to Compress lividly, with an expecting look. "Is anyone else underage?"

"Not a one, I promise you!" the man exclaimed, waving his hands in a placating gesture. "You seem...very concerned."

"Yeah, well, I'm not going anywhere *else*," the girl cut in again, pouting. "The League is the only place that likes me. Everyone else thinks I'm a freak that should just die, so feel bad for someone else, Mr. Eraserhead."

In a, somehow, chilling way, Aizawa's head turned again, and the girl continued smiling for a moment before she noticed the dark expression he wore and actually gulped. Aizawa knew this feeling. It was the *'battered kid syndrome sense'* Hitoshi refused to stop joking about. *Not again.* "What's your name," he said, voice devoid of emotion.

"Um...Toga Himiko!"

"I see." He used his free hand to pull out a small notepad and started searching for a pen. "Did your parents abuse you?"

"H-huh?" Thrown off, the girl stumbled back half a step, then began to look like a deer in headlights when the other members of the League began to stare at her, like they were caught up in some weird freakshow. It felt surreal, like they'd stepped into the Twilight Zone,

and neither side was attacking so they had no idea what to do. "N-no...I mean...they just called me weird and ugly...and then stopped throwing birthday parties for me, because I was scary...and stopped checking to see if I came home from school...and sometimes they locked me out of the house...then one time my dad slapped me but I was gonna run away anyway-"

"Give me the names of your parents."

"Um- why, Mr. Eraserhead?"

"I am going to find them," Aizawa said methodically, writing her name down in his notepad, "and have them arrested." He looked at one of the other villains. The man squeaked and jumped, hiding behind a large woman wearing sunglasses, and she whispered out a quiet *hush, sugar.*

He looked back to Shigaraki.

The man- barely a man at all- jumped when he realized he had. He leaned back, as if he wanted to take a step back, but then steeled himself. "What?" he demanded, with the false bravado Aizawa recognized from every twenty year old who felt defensive. "If you think you're going to arrest all of us-"

"Why were you meeting with these men?" Aizawa interrupted him. Shigaraki opened his mouth to answer him, probably to lie, but Toga jumped in before he could.

"They were trying to hurt Izuku-kun!" she yelled, stomping her foot. "They can't do that!"

Aizawa froze.

Of course.

Of fucking course.

Of goddamned course he somehow knows some of these people.

"I see," he said slowly. "Let me get this straight. You attack my class, and then you hunt down those trying to hurt someone in my class?"

A very awkward air settled upon those in the warehouse. The members of the League glanced at each other, shifting in place, and the only truly calm one there was the warper, who had subtly moved

closer to Shigaraki.

"He's...useful," Shigaraki muttered, not looking Aizawa in the eyes. "For...leveling up."

He glanced at the warper. Clearly, he was some kind of mentor to him, or some kind of guardian. "I did my best to only displace them?" the man tried, sounding a bit unsure even if unbothered.

Well, he had no idea what the hell that meant, but Aizawa got the feeling he wasn't getting anymore out of them, and he only had so much capture weapon. He also wasn't stupid enough to think he would win in a fight with the whole lot of them. He raised his capture weapon a little so Tornado's pained face came into view. "I am going to arrest you now," he said flatly. Because he could multi-task, he had both his pen and his knife in his other hand, and he pointed both at the man's throat. "If you *ever*, and I mean *ever*, so much as think of coming near my students, any of them, ever again, I *will* kill you, and no one will ever find your body."

"Okay," the man replied weakly, terrified, and Aizawa gave his weapon a particular snap that made each member of the former hero team shriek as they were rolled into one giant ball.

He turned and gave the League one last appraising look. Seeing them up close...it was different, and what the girl had said- *The League is the only place that likes me*- it somehow reminded him of...his class. The way they had grown together and shielded each other from the outside world. The way they felt like a group of people who had found solace in each other.

And Shigaraki himself, he had changed, somehow. At the USJ- he'd been unhinged. Acting like someone who had the control of a twelve year old playing a video game and rage quitting. The fact he was only twenty- it made him think. Was he like Toga, had he been battered and abused by society to the point he sought solace in this group? Had he been raised in it? Had he been groomed to be something he wasn't supposed to?

He had treated the Nomu much like a disposable part of a game, but he seemed to fit into the rest of this group like he belonged to it.

Was the League of Villains, rather than a group of evil, terrorizing people, rather just a group of people who'd been spat on by society and couldn't take anymore?

Aizawa had worked with heroes; he'd worked with vigilantes. He knew the world wasn't black and white. But he'd been under the impression the League's goals were more...malicious. They had been behind the Hosu attack, after all- but then again- those Nomu had gone after Endeavor. Even Aizawa had wanted to strangle Endeavor before. Now they were going after dirty Heroes.

He still couldn't condone what they were doing, but he was starting to think they weren't simply *evil*.

"Unfortunately, I do not have enough capture weapons to hold all of you," he said, in his dullest tone of voice. "So I will be retreating now."

The fact he said anything at all before leaping for a rafter and vaulting out of the roof, dragging his quarry with him, was a clear offering- *get out of here before I have to try and arrest you-* and the members of the League stood there, staring at the ruined roof above them, for a long time.

Things had been going great, in Himiko's opinion. They'd been about to ambush some of the last people going after Izuku-kun, courtesy of Hana-chan's amazing hacking skills, and she would get to try out her brand new knives, when what looked like a feral demon with glowing red eyes came crashing through the ceiling and started to beat the shit out of the League's prey.

It happened so fast she could hardly keep up. She had to squint to even see right- it was a man, dressed in all black, and there was some kind of weird fabric whipping all around him and slamming those dirty Heroes into each other. They were screaming so deliciously loud, too - and it was still a liiittle scary how his eyes were glowing.

Then he stopped, and started talking to them. After screaming at the Heroes for a while. And Himiko realized that he *was* a Hero. She'd never seen any Heroes act like that before.

"A hero willing to act like a villain," Tomura murmured eventually, thoughtfully. "Izuku's teacher..."

They were all still standing there, awkwardly, not really knowing what to do. Tomura, in her opinion, was a total weirdo, because now he was rubbing at his neck- not scratching, at least, he'd improved there because of Compress grabbing his wrists every time he tried and starting a game of cat's cradle- and mumbling under his breath. "*Man,*

Eraserhead is so cool..."

Near the back, Dabi simply swore under his breath, because *thank fuck* he hadn't been recognized or looked at with too much scrutiny. He'd only come because apparently this hero group had a fire user, and he'd decided to be nice and make sure his little brother's best friend didn't get randomly murdered, but that had been...close. Too close.

At least Shouto had a good teacher watching out for him.

"Tomura?" Compress finally broke the silence by placing a hand on Tomura's shoulder, making him startle and look up at him with round eyes. "I believe we should return home. Other Heroes may come this way- you should leave before that."

Tomura stared at him for a minute, round-eyed, and slowly nodded and started wandering his way towards Kurogiri, who'd opened a warp. Then Compress' eyes fell on Toga, who was humming as she walked towards them.

"Toga? Are you all right?"

"Hmm?" She paused, having absolutely no idea what the man was talking about, and something deep in Dabi's gut burned. Toga was absolutely nothing like any of his siblings, let alone Shouto, but the way she said it so *casually...one time my dad slapped me...*if Eraserhead didn't get those shitheads arrested, maybe he needed to burn them alive. "Yeah, I'm fine! Why wouldn't I be?"

"Well...I just wanted to be sure. Come along, now."

"Aww, sugar," Magne muttered behind him, staring at the back of Toga's head sadly, and Dabi realized, not really for the first time, but maybe for the first time so lucidly, that they really were all very fucked up.

He guessed that was why they were still stuck together, despite how much they bickered.

Shouto wasn't home. He'd gone to a sleepover, for the first time in his life, to his green friend's house, because he was apparently incapacitated from a building collapsing on him, which was kind of concerning, because Dabi's kid brother might have been in that building. He supposed it was for the best, though- Toga had a tendency to sneak into his 'shiny new house' at night and root through

his freezer, something she'd gotten Spinner to hop in on too, and it was fucking annoying (even though Shouto had run into them in the hall once and just stood there, face blank, and directed them to the freshest steak, which was also concerning that his brother apparently couldn't recognize burglars).

The entire League, actually, had the annoying habit of dropping in without warning. More than once Kurogiri had popped his head in through a warp to tell him something, and Magne had dropped by three separate times to give him plants and other shit to decorate. (Where did she even get the money for that stuff?) At least Tomura stayed away unless someone dragged him there; Shouto would *probably* recognize him.

Compress was the worst about it.

"How has 'civvy life' been treating you, Dabi?" he asked cheerfully, perched on Dabi's bar stool with a glass of wine. Dabi stared back at him raggedly, wondering if diving out the window to avoid conversation was a viable option.

"It's not filthy like the fucking hideout."

"Ah, yes." Atsuhiro rubbed at his chin with his thumb, and it was weird, seeing him without his masks. "I guess you must worry about infections...say, how about a nice painting for over the fireplace? It would add some atmosphere!"

Groaning, Dabi rolled his eyes and turned away, listening to the sound of Atsuhiro's rumbling laughter as he stalked out of the kitchen into the living room to start closing the blinds. He didn't like the idea of anyone being able to see in at night. It had already darkened outside.

The one time Shouto *had* been over while Compress was there had been mortifying. Atsuhiro had been giddy, gleefully telling him he could call him *Uncle Atsu* if he wanted, and he'd patted Dabi on the shoulder at *least* twelve times in the span of one evening. God help him-

The doorbell rang.

Dabi paused.

That was...odd. No one had this address, except for the people involved in Shouto's case, his classmates, and, well, the League. Wondering if it was a marketer or some shit- but surely not at this

time of night- Dabi wandered over to the door with a frown, feeling an odd sense of foreboding as he reached for the knob and pulled it open.

When he saw who was staring back at him, he felt his entire body freeze up.

Kill him.

"Touya," his father said, very quietly. "So...it is...you."

Kill him.

He was dressed plainly, no fire in sight, no hero costume. He was still just as tall. He towered over everyone. His shoulders had a slight slump to them, and he was staring at Dabi with an expression that he hated, because it was almost, *almost*...sad.

"What," he forced out, "what. Are you doing here."

"I was hoping to...I'm not sure," Endeavor- not his father, not his dad, not Enji, this was Endeavor, only Endeavor- "I just- I wanted to-"

Kill him.

Dabi couldn't move his body.

He couldn't breathe.

What the fuck was wrong with him.

He hated his father. He wanted to kill him. He wasn't afraid of him. *He wasn't afraid.* But now here, in this- this house, looking like Touya, in a place where he had almost started to feel...a little more normal again, he felt-

Kill him.

I can't breathe.

"Ah, hello, Todoroki-san," Atsuhiro's voice cut in, sounding deceptively pleasant as he opened the door wider to stand beside Dabi and set a hand on his shoulder, smiling. He'd subtly nudged him to the side, grip firm, and there was something razor-edged to his expression. "I do believe that by court order you aren't allowed within five miles of this abode. May I ask why you are here?"

Endeavor jerked as if burned- the irony- and worked his jaw, struggling for an answer. "I-"

"I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to leave. Unless you would like for me to call the detective assigned to this case."

Endeavor stopped. Gritted his teeth. He looked away, and Dabi stood there, feeling like he'd had a boot on his throat.

The investigation into Endeavor was still ongoing. His PR team was doing everything they could to make things 'go away,' saying it was only circumstantial, the charges against him- oral testimonies without video proof, pictures that could be from Yuuei's training, no evidence in the house, no medical records- and Endeavor was letting it happen. He was doing nothing, and if he had any shred of him that wanted to be a 'better person,' he would have put his hands out for the cuffs himself.

"I'll leave. ...Goodbye, Touya. I'll-"

"Do nothing, unless you would like a second violation," Atsuhiro said, and then slammed the door and locked it.

Dabi stared at that door, thinking of his father's face, of how his hands had itched to light themselves on fire, and how no fire had come, and-

"Dabi, look at me, please."

Atsuhiro's hands took ahold of his face and turned it towards him. "Breathe," the man instructed softly, eyes soft. It made Dabi realize that he *wasn't* breathing, and he took in a large gasp, letting it out as Atsuhiro softened and pulled him closer.

He was hugging him. Dabi couldn't remember the last time someone had hugged him, other than when he'd met his siblings again.

"Everything will be all right."

Dabi had never accepted any affection from the League freely, only rolled his eyes and looked away and shrugged it off, but just this once, he let himself slowly slump over, and he just stood there, wishing Compress was right.

Atsuhiro was in the middle of leaving the Todoroki household- well, that just didn't sound right; they needed to get Dabi a name change,

perhaps to his mother's name- when he heard it. That demonic voice ripping into someone. He made his way down the path to the street, and saw it: Eraserhead, uniform still stained with blood in some places, practically snarling as he stood there with glowing red eyes and Endeavor actually leaned away from him and nearly into a low-hanging tree.

"I'll be fucking reporting this, Endeavor, and if you come anywhere near my student or his family again you'll regret it," Eraserhead growled, bloodshot eyes wild. He looked like some kind of rabid animal. "Do you understand me?"

"Yes," Endeavor replied, through gritted teeth, as he side-stepped away from the man. "Clear."

"Then get the fuck out of my sight."

Atsuhiro could have sworn the man literally did growl as Endeavor walked off, at a much faster pace than usual, and he smiled as he approached. *Well, I hope this doesn't go terribly.* "Ah- may I have your name, sir? I am a friend of Touya-kun's, and I was visiting this evening, and I was planning on reporting his father's violation myself, but having a second witness would make it easier..."

Like someone had cut the strings holding him up, Eraserhead slumped over- with an *alarming* amount of exhaustion showing on his face- and turned to look at him. The bags under his eyes reminded Atsuhiro of Tomura. Gods, he looked two steps from falling over- how was he even walking?

"Eraserhead," the man uttered, blinking tiredly. "Aizawa Shouta. I was involved with the case originally."

"Sako Atsuhiro," Atsuhiro said, offering his hand to shake. "Are you quite all right? You look...a bit ill."

"I'm fine," Eraserhead brushed him off, instantly, making Atsuhiro inwardly frown. He could always tell when people were not, in fact, fine.

"May I ask why you're here so late? There's nothing to be concerned about, is there?"

"Oh." Squinting as if he had just remembered himself, Eraserhead reached into one of the pouches on his belt and pulled something out. It was a bracelet with little charms on it, including a pink one. His

voice began to get raspier as he spoke. "I was returning this to my student. He left it in the classroom."

Atsuhiro raised an eyebrow. "This late at night?"

"It's very important to him. Some of them get...upset if they lose certain things, and I'd rather avoid him worrying about it longer than necessary."

Something in Atsuhiro felt a bit like a fresh, warm cookie from the oven crumbling as someone tried to pick it up too early. The man really was just...a teacher, before a Hero, trying to take care of his students.

"I'm afraid Shouto-kun is at a sleepover tonight, but you're free to come in. His brother hasn't turned in quite yet."

Eraserhead nodded.

That was how they ended up in the kitchen, with *two* glasses of wine, the bracelet sitting on the counter while Dabi- passed out on the couch with a blanket over his head- snored softly. Apparently Atsuhiro having a house key was more proof he was trustworthy, along with Dabi mumbling a vague affirmation at him when he greeted him, as he got the feeling Eraserhead wouldn't have stayed longer than necessary otherwise. He looked dull, like he needed a good bath, nap and massage. It reminded Atsuhiro so much of Tomura it was almost weird.

"I think it's commendable, Aizawa-san," he said with a smile, after Aizawa had given him a very brief summary of why he was so exhausted. He hadn't included there being a hit on a student, only vaguely alluding to some heroes threatening one, but since he had *been there*, Atsuhiro already knew. "Going so far for a student."

"They're just kids," Aizawa muttered, more to the countertop than to him. "They hardly even know what they want to be. Gonna fucking retire after this," he mumbled, rubbing his eyes. "Gonna get them to graduate, even if it kills me."

At this rate, it might, Atsuhiro thought, subtly pouring him more wine.

"I'm starting to think there are only two kinds of people in this world," Aizawa continued mumbling. "Hurt kids, and people who fucking hurt them." His hand tightened on the counter where it had been laying, so hard his knuckles turned white. "And there's too many. Too many

fucking hurt kids."

Atsuhiro felt a pang in his chest.

This was a real one- a real hero, that is. Atsuhiro, he had long since given up on hoping Heroes would help anyone in his life. He had been in crime for what felt like forever. But Eraserhead was one of the only genuine people on the "good side" he'd ever met. Because he knew exactly who Eraserhead was talking about, and they were on the bad side.

He reached over and gave the man's shoulder a gentle pat. "There's a third kind. The people who help them."

Eraserhead let out a quiet sound that might've been a sigh. Atsuhiro made a mental note to add him to the 'no kill' list when he got back to the hideout, though he didn't think he would meet much argument.

Chapter End Notes

dadpress: never come near me or my edgelord son ever again

the league and aizawa, as they start to very weirdly adopt each other: ??????????????????

Don't Be Fooled

Chapter Notes

> eiichii, probably, at some point seeing the media call izuku all might's son: oh fuck

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Seriously, Shou," Hizashi sighed as he rubbed shampoo into his hair. "You're going to turn grey at this rate."

"Am not," Shouta murmured in reply, eyes closed under a cloth as Hizashi washed his hair for him. He was laid out in their bathtub, with, probably, way too much bubblebath applied- he hadn't actually seen how much Hizashi poured in- but the warm water was doing wonders for his sore muscles. "Should we invite Yagi to that dinner with Thirteen and Nemuri and Fukukado? We should invite Yagi to that dinner."

"Are you going to just start worrying about everyone now?"

"He is alone, I suspect he has some sort of depressive disorder, and he had less than ten contacts in his phone."

"When did you look in his phone?"

"Why does every person we meet this year need therapy? Why do all the students need therapy, Hizashi?"

"I don't know, Shou."

"Even the villains need therapy."

"That's kind of a given."

"One of them's a *sixteen year old girl."*

Hizashi sighed and reached for the plastic pitcher on the counter full of water to pour into his hair, fingers rubbing comforting circles into Shouta's scalp. "Babe. We'll figure this out."

"I goddamn hope so."

All Shouta wanted was one day- *one day*- without any major incident.

He still had to talk to Izuku about how he knew the *League of Villains*, of all people, but he'd decided to just wait a bit on it, to give himself one tiny little break.

He couldn't even get one day.

He woke up to an email from Todoroki, expressing concern about the upbringing for one of his mentors, and a very long, rambling message about just how the Pro Hero Hawks had been trained.

Shouta rubbed his forehead and settled in to do more fucking detective work.

"I suspected," Nedzu said, in a disappointed tone, when Shouta brought the story to him. "But I never found proof. But if we can get him onboard at Yuuei..."

The unspoken implication was clear. Even if it was just as a TA, an occasional battle simulation specialist, hell, a fucking janitor for all Shouta cared, their legal department could step in on behalf of Hawks. With what had been happening as of late, Nedzu had apparently been scouting for heroes that could be trusted, and he invited Shouta into a group- not that he wanted another group chat, but he would stomach it for this purpose.

[Confidential]

Nedzu: I've spoken to you each individually, so you all know the purpose for this group.

Snipe: Shit, is it time?

Nedzu: There is someone we need to bring into the fold. I assume you all know of the number three hero, Hawks?

Midnight: Gold hair, bright red wings. Hard to miss the cutie.

Mt. Lady: I've met him, he seems nice enough. kind of off though. maybe a little cocky,

Eraserhead: commission fucking bought him like an animal when he was a toddler. raised him from the age of five to be a hero and never gave him an option.

Ryukyu: fucking hell

Mt. Lady: ok I retract what I said

Ectoplasm: It was rather strange. He debuted when he was only nineteen, and he skyrocketed to the top of the charts quite quickly. He had his own agency set up, a PR team, and plenty of news coverage anywhere he fought.

Gang Orca: Please hold on one moment, I need to add someone.

[Gang Orca] added [Miruko]

Miruko: yeah shit's fucked up. they put him through "stress sessions" where they basically fucking torture him to raise his pain tolerance, i'm pretty sure they have him on some kind of quirk suppressant drugs, and he has fucking handlers who watch his every move. he's not even supposed to go to normal hospitals when he gets hurt- only to the commission's medbays. they fucking own everything he's got. his agency, his contracts with his sidekicks. they watch his accounts- i set him up one we've been trying to siphon money into so he has a nest egg. i had to get him a burner phone to use just to text me.

Ingenium: my god

Present Mic: We need to be careful how we bring him in. I think a presentation for the battle simulations would be a good start.

All Might: I may have a solution as well.

Thirteen: ?

All Might: I find it makes it much harder for the Commission to make people disappear when they are friends of mine.

Izuku felt pretty loopy when he pulled his phone into bed to look at the news and such. A good week had gone by, and he felt much better, with the near constant physical contact from his friends, but he was tired. The first thing he saw, at first, confused him.

Someone had taken a short video of All Might landing outside the store Izuku had been shopping in when he found out he was a Shimura. It showed him hoisting Izuku into his arms, one hand curled protectively around his head, before he jumped again and the video ended, along with the joyous cries of hello to everyone's favorite hero. It wasn't that odd of an occurrence, now, because Izuku had been seen with All Might before, and people knew he was basically his protege,

but apparently someone had made a compilation video that was making the rounds.

Somehow, someone had caught a picture of them at the beach, All Might in midair, with Izuku in his arms again as he laughed. One time All Might, in full hero form, had landed in a quiet street 'as subtly as he could' to drop him off some ice cream, and someone had taken a picture of him handing it to Izuku while he beamed. There were other photos and short clips of him being generally affectionate, and the video overall was titled *All Might - Favorite Student? More Like Secret Son.*

Even worse, the comments weren't even taking it as a joke. Izuku felt his face heat up as he scrolled through news site after news site that said it was *adorable* and *so cute* how All Might apparently had a son. The current speculation was that he'd been adopted, which...wasn't that far from the truth. For once, the rumor mill wasn't all that inaccurate. (Though Shouto had been disappointed when his 'secret love child' theory had been proven technically untrue, he'd still been smug that All Might had basically volunteered to be his dad.)

Another interesting news piece caught his eye. He clicked it open and found a video of All Might dealing with someone with a gigantification Quirk, easily countering its gargantuan strength, while what looked like streaks of red got bystanders out of the way. After the fight was over, All Might stood with his hands on his hips and let out a loud, booming laugh, calling up to where Hawks was in the air and waving him down.

"Good job, young Hawks!" Izuku could hear him say from the newscaster's video camera. *"You're quite skilled!"*

Izuku recognized Keigo's genuine, embarrassed smile. He was even blushing a little bit. It wasn't like he was an All Might fanboy, but come on, it was the Symbol of Peace, and he surely felt abashed at the praise.

"Come, come, let's give the press some photos!"

All Might did seem to be being overly friendly, though. His time limit had increased with the addition of a lung, but he tried not to hang around after crime scenes much anymore- but at some point he held up his biceps and let a now downright giggly Keigo sit on one, and they posed with his wings outstretched and Toshinori beaming as hard as he could for the cameras.

Throughout that week, the number one hero and "considered number two hero" (considering how much people hated Endeavor, right now) ended up fighting together again almost every day. Izuku wondered why.

That Sunday he opened the newspaper for his neighborhood and found that Aldera was being shut down due to years' worth of charges of neglect and student endangerment. He nearly started crying in his driveway.

Bakugou couldn't really put into words how he'd been feeling lately. If he had to try, he'd say he felt nothing.

He felt empty. Every time he went home and saw his parents' disappointed faces, it churned old feelings of inferiority (or perhaps, the fear of inferiority) and he usually shut himself in his room, put his earbuds in, and blasted music until he couldn't hear anything.

He couldn't look D...Izuku in the face. He couldn't even look in his general direction. It hadn't been so bad, at first, but then he'd gone and healed that Iida prick's older brother. He'd healed All Might. Bakugou had heard him scream in a way he'd never heard him scream before. He'd been having nightmares about that, about him screaming but instead of a Quirk causing it it was Bakugou himself, cackling as he did. He dreamt about being a villain. About stomping on Izuku's face until there was nothing left, but he was still crying, and begging his Kacchan to be friends with him again.

He started crying in bed at night.

It didn't happen fast. His sessions with Hound Dog had been like pulling teeth at first. He didn't *want* to talk, not about this, but Hound Dog was infuriatingly patient, despite appearances, and eventually he started talking for him. He started talking about how people had always been afraid of his appearance, and thought he would be a bully to them when he was a kid, and for a few years in elementary, he had, just to scare them away- bared his teeth and roared and threw things- before he changed schools and started seeing a counselor. He talked a lot, and eventually Bakugou started talking back, a few mumbled words here and there.

He didn't like going to see Hound Dog. Because the Pro always said exactly what Katsuki was afraid of thinking.

It was wrong what he'd done.

It was horrible.

It shouldn't have been allowed.

...but he said other things, too.

He said that even though Katsuki wasn't exempt of any of the blame, that his actions were still his actions, that he'd still been a kid. Just a kid. That there was nothing wrong with his *personality*, but learning his fiery personality from his mother wasn't a good mix for going to schools where the teachers groomed him for becoming a hero who looked down on others. Hound Dog showed him diagrams, books sometimes, short lectures on how children's brains developed and-

And sometimes, Katsuki realized just how fucked up it all was, and it made him want to shove his earbuds so far down he'd never hear anything again.

"I'd like you to write down what you feel like you can't say," Hound Dog told him, during one session, handing him a pad of red paper and a pad of blue paper. "For things you're angry about, on the red, and things you're sad about, on the blue, then explode them after."

Katsuki didn't think that would help, but, strangely, it did, sometimes.

I fucking hate everything, he wrote on one red piece, and felt a weird sort of catharsis when he exploded it in his palms.

I hate myself. on the blue.

I'm sorry- an aborted attempt on the blue.

I hate this stupid exercise on the red.

In one session, Hound Dog asked him to say it aloud- the crux of why he was there. It took him a long time. A few weeks in, he was finally able to say it- to choke out-

"I- I was- a bully. And it was- it was wrong." He thought of Eijirou, and Mina, and Denki, and all their stories about their bullies and how angry it made him- how much he wanted to explode those assholes' faces- only to stop and realize *they were him*. What if he'd met his friends now in middle school? "I...I bullied Izuku. I destroyed his things. I...I told him to jump off the roof. I'm-" He'd cried during his

last session, even though he'd kept swiping at his face, angrier and angrier until his voice wasn't working. "And I'm- I'm sorry."

Hound Dog had told him he'd done well.

Some part of him yearned for it, and some part of him felt like a piece of shit getting handout prizes for things other people were already good at so why was *he* having problems with it-

"Katsuki, there's something we've been avoiding," Hound Dog told him. "Something important. You've been able to acknowledge how you and Aldera mistreated Izuku. That's good. I'd like you to tell me how they mistreated you."

It was the request that made Katsuki freeze.

It was stupid. It was *stupid*! He'd been the bully! He was the bad one! He was *bad*! How had *he* been mistreated? He was the school's golden kid, he could do no wrong, he had the best part of it all. He had it made! Why didn't Hound Dog understand that?

"Katsuki," he said, oddly gentle compared to his appearance. "Your teachers mistreated you in that they failed to set healthy boundaries for your behavior. They did not teach you right from wrong. They let you do what you pleased without learning what consequences are. They made your record clean when it shouldn't have been, they broke the law to put you ahead. They groomed you to be a person that put down others and had no true friends."

That wasn't true. He wasn't that fucking weak! It wasn't *true*. He'd- he'd been the bully. He was just bad, on his own. No one had made him that way- he was just *rotten*. The room felt hot, and he could feel sweat sliding down his face, and he suddenly thought of the first day he'd set off an explosion too loud and not been able to hear his mother call him across the house very well, and how afraid he'd been.

"You're wrong," he choked out, and ran out of the office.

But he had to come back, because he had to if he wanted to be a hero.

And why did he want to be a hero?

We'll become heroes together, Kacchan!

The guilt might eat him alive. He remembered; he remembered so well. Happy, dancing, pretty green eyes staring up at him in wonder

with a smile as Izuku- not Deku- said they could be a hero duo that won every fight. How he really just wanted to be Katsuki's friend. How he really just didn't want to be alone. How that was what Katsuki had made him, for over a decade.

But seeing him *not* alone- not in Aldera- here in Yuuei, where Izuku had friends who loved and cared for and respected him- deep down some part of him wished he could go back and do it all over. Then he would be in that spot right now. Izuku's friend. Going to the top with him.

"Katsuki, I'd like you to try again."

"M-my teachers mistreated me," Katsuki said, holding onto the bag of hard sand Hound Dog used as a stress ball like it was his lifeline. "By not giving me fair treatment as anyone else, and...stunting my development...and- not teaching me properly."

"This is good, Katsuki. I know that you feel acknowledging how you've hurt others is the most important thing. But you need to acknowledge how you were mistreated as well, or you will hold onto this guilt far longer than you need to. Please say it with me. You were a child."

"I was a child," Katsuki murmured, staring at Hound Dog's desk.

"We were all children."

"We were all children."

"They didn't deserve any of it."

"They didn't deserve any of it."

"And *I* didn't deserve any of it."

"And I...didn't deserve any of it."

"And I will do better."

"I'll- I'll do better. I fucking swear."

Hound Dog wrote him a script for something that he couldn't pronounce that was supposed to help with his mood swings, anxiety, and the depressive episodes he had. He put in an order for hearing aids that would blend in as earrings, too, because Bakugou had been too ashamed to wear his proper ones to school for too long. Because his teachers long ago had told him that real heroes could have no

weaknesses, and maybe, that was part of why he'd told Izuku that too.

When he got to the common room that had been set up for students that needed rest round-face was standing in front of the door, hands on her hips.

"Bakugou," she said haughtily, wrinkling her nose at him. "What do you want?"

Katsuki scowled. He knew it was obvious what he was doing- he'd never gone to the lounge before- and he couldn't deny she had a right to hate his guts, but it was still annoying. "Going into the lounge. What's it look like."

"Izuku is resting. He doesn't need to be disturbed."

"I just want to talk to him."

"He doesn't need you disturbing him."

His eyes narrowed into a glare. So did hers, and they stood there in the hall, lightning crackling between their gazes for a solid minute. She finally pulled back with a taunting look and crossed her arms.

"Beat me in a fight, and I'll let you talk to him."

Katsuki scowled. "You're on."

He was not prepared for how much Ochako had learned from Miruko. He ended up on his ass, in another chokehold, three times in a row, with his hands rendered useless.

But he kept trying, and coming back for more, because Izuku's friend- *even though this just meant she was the friend Izuku deserved, and it was good, and it would make sure Katsuki didn't hurt him again-* wouldn't give in, but he was determined.

"I just want to fucking apologize, you prick!" he screamed, outside in the grass, one day, tears in the corners of his eyes. "I know I'm a horrible person! I know I'm a fucking screw up! I just want to fucking say sorry before I never can again!"

Ochako stared down at him, face blank.

"Fine," she said, and turned away. "You can talk to him." She started

walking away, dusting the dust and dirt off her knuckles. "You aren't a bad person. Just prove to me that you've changed."

Katsuki stared after her. He wondered if his entire class hated him.

They hated him, they hated him, they hated him.

He found Izuku in the lounge, sitting on a sofa while the purple-haired one snored away next to him. Across the room, Shouto watched them with a cool gaze, and worst of all, Katsuki's own friends were there; Eijirou and Mina and Denki gathered around a table playing cards. But Katsuki came to a stop in front of his- the person who had been his best friend, once. Izuku looked up at him and blinked, then looked nervous. Katsuki hated that it was because of him. "Um...h-hi, Kacchan."

Ochako, sitting near the door, held onto her spoon like she might stab him with it.

"I'm sorry," Katsuki forced himself to say, short and blunt.

Izuku blinked, long and slow again, looking absolutely bewildered. "Um...what?"

"I'm. Sorry. When we were kids- I- I bullied you. I was a bully. I was a shit friend. You...deserved better, and I'm sorry."

The room was silent for quite a while. Izuku stared at him, eyes flitting around, before they finally settled somewhere on the floor to his right.

"...I...I really appreciate that, Kacchan," he said, quietly, but his tone made Katsuki's stomach drop. "But, um...I just...I'm not...you know, really comfortable with you...being close to me. If we could...keep class like it is, that would be nice. I...I really believe you're sorry, but...I don't think we can...be friends like before."

Katsuki felt that emptiness again, thinking back to when he'd felt a rush of panic after seeing Izuku fall and moved without thinking, jumping into the lion's den to help him, reaching out to pull him up like Izuku had done for him when they were kids, and Izuku taking his hand, and wondered if the answer would have been different if he'd apologized sooner.

"Okay," he said, stepping back. "Okay."

He turned around, but no one was glaring at him. Eijirou looked soft, and Mina was giving him a small, encouraging smile. Ochako had looked away, and was sipping at her tea.

"I'm sorry," Katsuki said again, not to anyone in particular, because he had come to realize that his class had been terrorized by kids just like him and he felt- he felt the need to say *I'm sorry*. And maybe something like disappointment was stirring in his chest as he walked out, but he didn't think they hated him, and he felt like something, even if it was very small, was changed for the better.

At least- at least Izuku knew he was sorry. Even if he never forgave him, or was his friend again.

"Hey, Bakugou."

He stopped in the hall, and found, of all people, Ochako walking up to him, arms folded across her chest. She'd gotten pretty ripped when he wasn't looking. All of them were improving, weren't they? Eijirou, Yaoyorozu, Todoroki...Izuku. "Hah?"

"Let's spar," Ochako said, making him frown in confusion. "Not right *now*. But on the weekends, or something. You're pretty good to spar against. You know?"

"...Sure." One time he might have said no, but what he saw now was someone who was just as good as him. Someone who could help him improve. He had to stop looking down on others, or he would stay the same, Hound Dog said. "What time."

Pro Hero Hawks was practically *vibrating* with joy when he was invited to give Class 1A a battle demonstration about fighting aerial foes. Everything he did was precise, professional, hell, pretty much perfect- making the bad feeling in Shouta's gut worsen, because all it did was show how hard the Commission must have worked him to reach that level of perfection- but he also acted a bit like an overexcited kid, despite being twenty-two. (Even still, that was so young.) He didn't seem to notice he was bouncing on his heels as he spoke to each student, making up special exercises for them all, bounding over to his "chicks" to give them hugs while his wings seemed to...ripple? It wasn't quite the right word, but it was clear they were reacting to his emotions, moving about happily. He acted like a kid who'd never been let out to play with any others.

It was Ochako who asked him why he had wanted to become a Pro in

the first place. The man's expression paused, and Shouta saw, only because of how closely he was watching, the flash of indecision and pain before he smiled and answered. *When I was a little kid, a hero saved me. I wanted to become a hero who could save people like he did. I...I discovered later that he wasn't a hero at all, but I still think it's worth it. To...try and help people.*

He glanced down at his phone at some point. His face fell for a brief moment before he shoved it into his pocket and ignored it, putting on a bright smile again. In a weird way, it almost reminded Shouta of Yagi, who always smiled through his pain. He was fairly certain it was some Commission lackey probably texting the kid and yapping about this being a waste of his schedule.

He squawked when Katsuki exploded one of the feathers he'd had the boys chasing, yelling out in indignation about *this is why I usually don't like kids!*, making the boy actually start to *laugh*, a real, genuine laugh and not the one he used when he was mocking people, and everyone around him started to join in. Even Mezo looked like he was trying to hide a grin under his mask.

What was in front of him was a collected Pro, an adult, someone who might fly- metaphorically- under everyone's radar, but what Shouta saw was only what he could imagine the man had looked like as a boy, going through whatever hell he'd had to tread through to get here, and he saw red.

"I want him," Shouta said, placing his hands laced together on the table.

Snipe looked over at him and tilted his head. "Really, Aizawa? We could at least vote. I mean, I'm sure he'd be a great help to any of our classes- I'd be interested, too-"

Shouta's expression turned grim. Without saying anything, he stood up from his chair, even though he was still tired from his bounty hunting that week, and grabbed his capture weapon. "All right. We'll decide that way."

Snipe immediately scooted back in his chair and held up his hands. "Jesus, never mind!"

"*Couldn't he have at least said we'll use rock paper scissors?"* Thirteen muttered.

Midnight bit into her lip to contain a teasing smile. "Are you sure you want him onboard, Shou? I mean, you barely said two words to him, so I think you scared him a little. He practically puffed up when you came up behind him."

"I am sure. I can keep a better eye on him this way."

"Well, all right then," Nedzu said with a hum, closing his binder. "That's decided, then!"

Hawks looked, as Aizawa had suspected, nervous as he looked over the contract that Nedzu had slid across the table to him. "You...want me to be your teaching assistant? Um...do you really need one? I mean- it's Yuuei and all, and-"

"All Might has been dealing with personal matters recently, and we need someone to fill in during class periods he can't be present for battle training," Nedzu told him with a disarming smile. "Also, your presence would just increase the efficiency of the students' training in general!"

"Uh...yeah, I suppose." Hawks' eyes darted to the side. "I just...don't know if the HPSC would approve, you know? I mean, I've got a busy schedule, and all that, ahah..." His fingers were twisted together, the paper held between his pinky and ring finger. "And my agency-"

"Well, that won't be a problem! All Might has graciously offered you a partnership with his agency, and with the class schedules, you would still have plenty of time to plan patrols." Nedzu's smile was blank, still, clearly stating what they were offering. It was making Hawks more nervous, and it pissed Aizawa off.

Underground Heroes functioned a little *differently* than abovegrounds did. They weren't in the spotlight, so they didn't get the support and funding that the HPSC often gave to their favorites. They didn't care about spotlight, or fame; they were more willing to work with vigilantes or *bend* some laws as they were. Most all of them that Aizawa knew had less than heartwarming feelings about the HPSC at all, from how it functioned to every representative they'd ever had to interact with. This right here, this was the product of the heart of what the HPSC was: a scared twenty-two year old who had every decision in his life made for him and was held to a standard of protection *'for the better of the public.'*

We're offering to help you.

That was the message Nedzu was sending, and the nervous young man needed only accept it. He would have Yuuei's legal team backing him. Any Hero working for them had to undergo extensive review processes before simply having their license revoked. They could provide housing, gear.

He seemed to think for a moment. His eyes drifted to the side, and somehow, Aizawa knew he was thinking about his interns. At times he wondered if he had helped the students grow or it was the other way around, or both.

After a moment, he quietly set the paper down and stared at the table.

"...All right. Do you gotta pen?"

Ambition: I got seven recruits all on my own, so you can't say it was a failure.

Armament: he's not lying, i was impressed

Safeguard: well, pigs must be flying. still haven't managed to kidnap me tho :/

Ambition: you LITERALLY have 24/7 security

Safeguard: a real evil mastermind would work around that

Ambition: UGGH you're so ANNOYING

Armament: he right, tho.

Ambition: stfu

Armament: i'll add 'kidnap izuku' to our evil mastermind checklist on the whiteboard

Safeguard: and what about that 'advice' i gave you?

Ambition is typing...

Ambition is typing...

Ambition is typing...

Armament: u still there shig?

Safeguard: he's fine. probably just crisising again.

Ambition: I think...you may have had a point.

Safeguard: maybe i should meet this guy, pretty sure i could read him

Ambition: NO

Safeguard: ???

Ambition: you're my player two, not his

Armament: does this make me player three?? :D :D :D

Ambition: ugh. i guess

Safeguard: welcome to the game! what's the name of the game?

Armament: destroy corrupt society!

Chapter End Notes

also: time to take bets on what hana's quirk should be c:

Now You Know

Chapter Notes

listen...hair bun izuku!! https://www.deviantart.com/sixofclovers/art/Deku-sketches-749561344

When the principal of Yuuei had called her and told her they'd found the original account poster on the illegal site Izuku had been posted on, Inko had held onto some small hope that it wasn't her estranged ex-husband. She never wanted to see his face again, let alone hear his voice or even have to think about him. But she ended up being disappointed, because her baby boy seemed to have just the worst luck in the world.

"You don't have to be here, you know that, right, Izuku?"

"I know, Mom," the boy muttered quietly in return, fiddling with his tie beside her as they stood in a police station. "I wanted to come."

She bit her lip and stared at the floor. He did, too. He really had seemed to get most things from her. She couldn't name anything that resembled Hisashi. Sometimes she wondered...well, it wasn't important now.

A door swung open. They both looked up. Aizawa pulled a plain-looking man in by the arm, heading for a hall that led to an interrogation room, but his eyes lingered on the two of them for a moment. When he saw both their expressions fall, he sighed and gave Hisashi's arm a jerk, yanking him along.

It was definitely her ex-husband. And he'd done exactly what Inko had always feared he would do, and gone after her son again.

Aizawa was disgusted with the story their culprit spun for them, because he was stupid enough to admit it all and insist it "wasn't a big deal." All of this trouble, over a hundred criminals, villains, and even *heroes* they'd had to hunt down and stop, all this mess, because of one sad, pathetic little man's drunken arrogance and spite? Because he hated his own family that much? Because he hated his *son* so much?

Beside him, Toshinori was having similar thoughts. Out of habit, his hand had wandered to his chest, because moments like these were

usually when he would have trouble breathing. More than anything, though, he felt an intense sensation of disgust. It was one thing to simply not want children- but to tell a partner one did, and then abuse them when, obviously, a child was the result of their union? Part of him couldn't even believe it. How could he not want Izuku? How could he look at the ray of sunshine that was Shimura Izuku and not want him? Toshinori had never had the chance to grow a family, to have children- how could this man have just squandered it so easily?

How could he just not *want* Toshinori's boy?

It didn't matter now. Some vicious part of him was glad the man had been caught and would be put away for even longer now, so he could go nowhere near *Toshinori's* boy. He didn't want Izuku- then fine. Toshinori did.

His mother had gone to the restroom, probably to wipe away a few tears she didn't want him to see, when an officer suddenly crested the corner with one of Midoriya Hisashi's arms in hand. Izuku froze.

He shouldn't still be afraid after all this time. He wasn't the same little kid that had to crawl into the refrigerator and weep until someone found him. But the sneer that grew on the man's face as he looked down at him was all too familiar, making his gut churn with anxiety.

"Aww, look, it's the little shit himself. Too bad someone didn't get it right."

"That's enough," the officer said gruffly, tugging at his arm, but Hisashi just smiled mockingly.

"What? Still too fucking scared to talk for yourself?"

"I would *appreciate* it if you didn't talk to my boy in such a way, or at all, for that matter," spat Toshinori, appearing out of nowhere to stand between them, with an amount of vitriol Izuku had never heard him use, not even for villains. He couldn't help but shrink back further.

He was a tall, towering figure, and Hisashi had to lean his head back to look him in the eyes and try to scowl. "What are you, his father or something?" he asked, mockingly.

"*Yes*," Toshinori growled back, blurting it out without even really realizing he'd done it, turning on his heel and grabbing Izuku by the shoulders. "You don't need to hear his worthless words, my boy, come

on."

Someone tapped the officer on the shoulder. It was Aizawa, who gave him a pointed look; he released Hisashi to the Pro Hero's grasp with a confused look and left them there, retreating back to report to Tsukauchi.

"I wouldn't say much more, if I were you," he advised, voice low and a hint of red in his eyes as he tightened his grip on Hisashi's elbow. The man turned his scowl on him, but clearly tried to hide his cringe. It was Aizawa who had caught him in the first place, and he still had bruises from that fucking capture weapon.

"And why is tha-"

Toshinori looked over his shoulder. It was the first time Aizawa had ever seen his eyes look the way they did. They glowed with an eerie blue, almost leaving a trail as he turned, starting to split his iris and make him look some kind of inhuman. He understood in that moment why some people were *scared* of All Might. A small voice in his head wondered if this was why people got freaked out by his *own* Quirk, which Hizashi lovingly referred to as 'the feral demon eyes!'

Hisashi shut his mouth. False bravado could only go so far. Aizawa spotted Inko then, wringing her hands as she stood further away from them in the room, probably having just come from the hall with a restroom sign. She was worrying her bottom lip between her teeth.

"Let's go," he growled, yanking Hisashi forward to leave, because he didn't want to make her look at the man's sorry mug any longer than necessary.

"U-um...All Might-san..."

"Inko-san, please, you may call me Toshinori! You do not have to be so formal...is something wrong? You look like you have something on your mind-"

"It's not that- I mean...I was just wondering if we could...change our arrangement a little."

Toshinori gave her a confused look. Biting her lip, Inko gave him a weak smile as she fiddled with a loose thread on her sleeve. "I...I heard what you said in the hall. You've...no idea how much I appreciate everything you've done for Izuku. He's...he's never *had* a

father before. And I know you may have just said it on impulse, but...I was wondering...if you would be interested in a joint-adoption with me?"

Toshinori paused, eyes widening a fraction.

"I thought...you may be his official father, and Aizawa-sensei and his husband can be Izuku's godparents...I just, if anything ever happens to me, I want him to have as many people as he can. But- if you don't want to, for any reason, I understand-"

"N-no! Not at all! I- I would be honored! Th...thank you, Inko-san..."

Inko smiled. "Thank you! And...you should just call me Inko, if you really don't want formalities...I mean, we are sort of similar to siblings, in a way, you know? Even though I...don't remember much about my mother."

"I...I can tell you about her, if you'd like."

"...I would like that. Very much."

Izuku was a crier. Toshinori knew that. He just wished it didn't tug on his damn heartstrings so much.

"Y-you really mean it?" he asked with watery eyes, looking like he expected Toshinori to say 'Nope! I don't want you at all!' at any moment and go flying out on a magic carpet. Deciding the best course of action was to just gather him up in a hug, Toshinori pulled him closer on the sofa in the Shimura apartment.

"I mean it. You mean the world to me, my boy."

Don't get attached to your successor, Nana had said her own predecessor had told her. *But I guess I kind of broke the advice.*

So did I, Nana...

Izuku's hair had gotten long and shaggy enough to scrape up into a barely-there ponytail. Even so, it was wild enough several strands poked out of the bun. Toshinori helped him wrangle it that night because it kept getting in his eyes while he tried to do his homework, and for the first time, he really saw the resemblance in Izuku's face to his old teacher. If he cried a little, he hid it.

"Wow," Hitoshi said, quietly, staring at the floor where a pink blanket they sat on was. "That's fucked up."

"I cannot believe your own father would do something so heinous," Tenya added, just as quiet, but with an implied exclamation point as he chopped his hand. Now that the danger was over- from Izuku's point of view- he had told his closest friends about what had happened, and why he'd had guards bringing him to school every day.

"I would have walked home with you too," Shouto told him, looking comically concerned. "Just to make sure if anything happened-"

Izuku bit into his lip and waved his hands. Ochako snickered a little into her hands. "It's fine, Shou, really. It's over now."

"But still," Momo sighed, setting her chin on her folded-up knees. "Your own father...I can hardly imagine it..."

Their little group was silent for a moment.

"I can," Hitoshi mumbled, making them all look at him. Momo's eyebrow creased in concern.

"No one ever wants to think someone they know would hurt them," Izuku whispered, clutching his hands together and staring at them. "But he...he was the first person who ever hurt me. And then it was my best friend. And my teachers, people who were supposed to take care of me. It always...hurts the worst. I would rather it be just some random villain, you know? But...even if you want to trust people...I think you still have to watch. Because if they *did* hurt you...it would be so much worse."

His friends were silent yet again.

A quiet bell rang. It meant they had five minutes until Midnight came in for art history. Everyone began to move and get their desks back in order, but Izuku paused when he felt a chilly hand on his. He looked back at Shouto, who'd developed a furrow in his brow.

Guilt began to gnaw at him. "I really would have told you, honest," he whispered, just so everyone wouldn't hear. "Aizawa-sensei just said to keep it secret. I didn't want anyone in danger because of me."

"I'd rather be in danger than you be in danger alone," Shouto replied, furrow deepening. "If something like that ever happens again...please tell me. You're the first friend i ever made, Izuku. I don't want to lose

you. It's almost a little annoying, sometimes, how you can see what people feel so easily, so you can tell that, can't you?"

Izuku wavered and then broke (quite easily). "I promise," he exclaimed, reaching down to wrap his arms around his friend's shoulders and hug him. "I won't worry you again, I swear..."

Shouto, moving like he was out of practice (or, sadly, had never gotten the practice), slowly raised his own arms to hold him. It was starting to get hot out, so he'd generally kept his cold side more active than his hot one, making everyone who sat near him happy. When he felt the other boy's fingers settle on his back, Izuku attributed the shiver that went down his spine to the chill. Nothing more than that. Obviously.

"Pr-promise," he said again, pulling away and trying to hide his red face as he reached for their blanket to fold up.

At some point a very determined reporter finally got ahold of All Might. He'd just finished a fight in the city square, and he'd planted his hands on his hips with a smile to dally with some of the press for a few minutes. A woman totally blindsided him when she whipped out a printed photo of him and Izuku near Yuuei, when he'd spotted the boy on his commute and leapt down to sweep him into the air and swing him around as a surprise. Izuku had shrieked at the suddenness of it, but he'd been laughing.

"All Might, sir! Are the rumors true? Is this boy your son?"

Coughing awkwardly, Toshinori looked away while a loud *SHIIIIIIIIT!* reverberated in his mind. He was so going to get shit from this- from everyone he knew. Gran Torino, Nighteye, Tsukauchi, they were all going to be so mad the news found out before them.

"Ahahaha, yes," he admitted, smiling sheepishly. "By adoption. His mother is an outstanding woman, I assure you, but his father was...not in the picture."

There was no reason to hide it, after all. The world would find out eventually.

The reporters started jabbering on with more questions, including if they had equal custody and what All Might knew about Izuku's interesting Quirk and how he balanced teaching and parenting, things he thought really were none of their business, and he gave them a

salute and a "Gotta go!" before leaping away and leaving them in the dust.

"You sure have a weird way of typing, Hana-chan," Toga said to her one day, as Hana sat there with her hoodie pulled up over her head. She had no idea why she was spending so much time at the League's hideout, but dammit, she'd gotten invested, and if Shigaraki couldn't make a good evil (cough-antihero-cough) overlord, it just meant she'd failed her project. Hana *hated* failed projects!

"Hm?" She looked up from her laptop, realizing Toga was referring to the way she kept her pinkies up while she typed. "Oh. It's because of my Quirk. I can basically zap any kind of electronics if I hold them, and I've got pretty good control over it, but it slips out if I get frustrated, and I've lost too many good laptops to it, soooo..."

"Really?" Looking interested, Toga reached into her pockets that seemed to go on forever and pulled out a bedazzled pink burner phone. "Show me show me!"

Rolling her eyes, Hana reached out and took the phone. She set her pinkie down. Instantly, the device started crackling and fizzing, a small explosion-like burst of energy inside making it pop and start to fall to pieces.

"Made it real hard to learn to hack, mind you," she said dryly, letting the phone pieces fall to the ground while Toga watched with sparkling eyes.

"That's so cool! You're just like Shiggy! He has to hold his pinkies up too! What are we doing today for the evil overlord list?"

Oh. Right.

Hana didn't think too hard on the 'just like Shiggy' comment. After all, plenty of people had Quirks based on hand usage. She hadn't actually seen Tomura's Quirk in action, but she was sure it was something all cool and befitting an evil overlord (that was what he'd said, anyway).

She got up and rolled out the whiteboard. *'HOW TO BE AN EVIL MASTERMIND 101'* was written in bright red at the top. The rest was a mess of various lists, her notes, and marked out sections and names.

"How about we just mess with Hawks again?"

"Yay! I love mess with Hawksy days!"

Keigo sure was having some kind of time. He didn't know if it was a good or bad one, but it was something.

Every time he so much as fucking looked at Dabi, the man somehow knew, and turned to him with a creepy grin that stretched at the staples in his face and a suggestive look in his eyes. He was too damned attractive, and he knew it, and he was an asshole. He'd let Keigo come around their "secret base," which he knew couldn't have actually been their secret base, because it was the empty first level of an abandoned building, and Toga had tried to actually eat him one time before realizing he was carnivorous too and dubbed him her "meat buddy." This involved sitting on the roof eating raw meat every Wednesday night, and while he liked the indulgence, it was only the beginning of how the League clearly was messing with him.

Compress always talked like he knew something Keigo didn't but was right in front of his face. Every time he visited, Kurogiri gave him fucking apple juice to drink. Not even in a glass, apple juice *boxes*. Twice had taken to Keigo very well, like they were practically best friends, but all they ever did was play games together. That's all the League seemed to do in *general*, other than try and fail to kidnap Izuku, which just further solidified Keigo's suspicion that his chick was secretly terrifying. Or maybe the League just wasn't all that bad. The only other thing they'd done outside of USJ was try to kill Endeavor, after all, and Keigo could see the appeal in that.

And Shigaraki? Didn't even seem to notice him, he just told Dabi to 'make sure his pet bird didn't leave feathers all over their hideout,' even though it was already filthy on its own, while muttering over a computer and notes with Armament.

And then there was Armament. He was convinced that woman was a devil. Oh, sure, she was nice enough, but she always kept her hoodie up and never showed her face, and Keigo only caught fleeting glances of a disturbing grin every so often. Kind of like Shigaraki, now that he thought about it. She seemed to be his right-hand-woman, planning everything, and one time she'd fried his phone for 'staring too much.' She was also the one who'd made the lights go out while they were alone with Toga and Spinner, who'd been telling a ghost story, which usually wouldn't bother Keigo, but when the lights cut out right as Spinner got to the climax, he'd shrieked and leapt behind the sofa while they laughed at him. He didn't know if Armament was her legit

name or not, but he didn't know what else to call her, other than the connection he made with the same hoodie she wore every single day, one with a metal logo sitting on the seam on the back under the hood.

Then there was the fact that he wasn't even sure if he still *needed* to be on this mission.

Teaching at Yuuei was...an odd experience. He pretty much just ran around after Eraserhead and did whatever he said, and got to continue in battle simulations and rescue practice. It was...nice, being around so many other Heroes who seemed to like him, because the staff all made a point to be friendly to him. Midnight even let him fall asleep on her lap once in the lounge, which he'd been extremely embarrassed about once he woke up, but she'd just giggled at him for almost half an hour while he fluttered about the staff room doing paperwork and trying not to die inside.

But the Commission- boy, they were pissed.

They had threatened to close his agency if he took the job, not knowing he already had, and then they'd followed through, but the next day Hawks showed up on live television shaking hands with a grinning All Might on the roof of the man's tower as his new agency partner. Now the Commission couldn't just revoke his license willy-nilly. Now they didn't control his income, because he was paid by Yuuei. Now he had three different lawyers on speed dial. Now he had official office hours they could use if they wanted to contact him.

It was...nice.

And he hadn't actually met with his handlers ever since he moved out of his apartment and into the one in Eraserhead's building (Keigo wasn't sure if the guy liked him or not, but he'd told him there was a vacancy, and it was closer to school, after all...) And no one came to Eraserhead's building. And he'd been ignoring Sotaru's calls. So he wasn't sure if this "infiltrate the League" business was still on.

...maybe he just liked them all a bit.

"I don't even know what my life is right now," he said despairingly, staring into his wine and making Rumi snort beside him.

"Poor you, becoming a schoolteacher. Think you'll get upgraded to having your own class someday?"

Keigo looked at her in horror. "God, I hope not! They're little terrors!" Sometimes Eraserhead had to leave class for a hot minute, and told Keigo to watch the kids, and it felt like he was an older sibling being told to babysit.

A deep, rumbling chuckle left Touya's chest. He was leaning against his kitchen counter, while the two of them and his sister sat at the bar, and heat flooded into Keigo's face. The man shared the innate ability to make him turn red with Dabi, which wasn't a connection he'd ever thought he'd make. "Aww, come on, birdie. Don't want to make it official? I'll get you a best teacher mug-"

Keigo groaned and let his face fall into the counter.

"Touya," Fuyumi chastised. "Don't terrorize him."

"What am I doing? I'm just talking."

Keigo's phone started to vibrate in his pocket. He just knew it was Sotaru again. He pulled it out just enough to check, and declined the call, and looked back up, and they were all staring at him. "Wh-what?"

Rumi sighed quietly.

Touya squinted at him.

The look on the birdie's face reminded him of how Shouto had looked when he'd had to break it to him that their father had shown up at the house and to be on the lookout, just in case. Quiet apprehension. Not wanting to show it, but being afraid. The kind of fear that was instilled through years of intimidation and being hurt.

It wasn't what Dabi had been expecting from the golden boy of the Hero Commission. But this sudden Yuuei job- and putting him with Eraserhead, of all people- that seemed pretty obvious to Dabi. They were making a play for him. Acting like he was one of their students they needed to get out of somewhere.

So yeah, it was pretty obvious whoever Hawks was in contact with at the Commission didn't treat him well.

"Hey, I need more wine!" Rumi exclaimed, grinning as she covered for her friend and swinging her glass out. "Fuyumi, pass the bottle?"

Fuyumi took the hint and passed it aside. She wouldn't pry, but *she* recognized that expression too. She'd seen it in the mirror

every day when her father came home.

"Well, hey," she said, trying to cheer him up. "We have something in common now. Rumi and *Touya* don't know the struggles of teaching, Keigo. Have you had someone puke on you yet?"

The man looked up at her in horror. "Puke on me?"

Fuyumi bit her lip and tried not to laugh. Maybe blissful ignorance would have been better.

till someone gets hurt

Chapter Notes

> momo: I'm one of the apex predator's right hand men.
> momo when someone threatens the apex predator: i AM the fucking apex predator now

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Keigo had been vomiting for about fifteen minutes now.

He didn't know what had happened. One minute he'd been eating a chicken salad, because Present Mic insisted he couldn't eat fried chicken every night, and then he'd felt his stomach churn and barely made it to his sink in time before he started throwing up. He felt like *death*. His head was pounding now, maybe because of how long he'd had it tilted down, and he felt like it was a hundred degrees in his new apartment.

A knocking came at the door.

Great, now he'd woken someone up.

Keigo groaned and tried to answer. No words came out, though, only a pained little warble.

"Kiddo? You all right in there?" Present Mic's voice called out. He lived two doors down- surely Keigo hadn't been that loud? "Hey, I'm gonna use my spare and come in, okay?"

Keigo wanted to tell him no, mostly out of embarrassment, but chose to give into the help and said nothing as the door creaked open. He heard Present Mic's footsteps- or Hizashi's, as he insisted Keigo call him outside of work- come over to him before a gentle hand began rubbing circles into his back. "Hey, listener. Sick?"

Keigo nodded miserably. He didn't feel like he was going to throw up anymore, though, so he shakily stood up straight and reached for a towel to wipe his mouth. Hizashi's brow furrowed as he got a good look at his face. He looked pale. "You eat something sour?"

Shaking his head, Keigo steadied himself on his counter. "No. No- I don't know. I've been feeling a little off."

Hizashi raised an eyebrow at him.

Feeling like a guilty child hiding something he shouldn't, Keigo averted his eyes. "You...remember when Principal Nedzu said I should stop taking anything the Commission had me on after Recovery Girl gave me an exam?" He'd phrased it a tad more subtly, saying Keigo should avoid any 'vitamins or supplements' the Commission dealt him. Hizashi's face became grimmer. "I-I quit taking something my handlers had me on, and I think it was...doing something."

"Do you have any of it left?" Hizashi asked him, the concern blatant in his voice, making Keigo hesitate before reaching for one of the kitchen drawers.

Hizashi snatched the pill bottle from his hand almost before he held it out. Of course it barely had a label on it, he thought, feeling revulsion for the bastards who'd given it to a minor. Nothing on it that could trace it back to the Commission. Only vague instructions to take it every day.

"Do you feel good enough to take a drive? I'm going to call Shouta and find out what's in this shit."

Keigo felt sick to his stomach for entirely different reasons about three hours later. He was sitting in a seldom-seen part of the Support Department wing, a sterile-looking laboratory type space that hosted a gigantic microscope and some sort of machine with vials sitting in it, while Recovery Girl frowned at a computer monitor.

Apparently, what he'd been taking for years now was a common but illegal type of Quirk suppressant. It didn't completely suppress a Quirk- it only kept it from growing past a certain point. If someone began to grow horns, for example, and they began to take the drug when they reached five inches in length, the horns would not grow any further.

He knew why they'd given it to him. It was an alternative to surgery to remove his feet talons that had come in when he was thirteen, a surgery that would have set his training back and possibly made him embittered at the Commission. It was why he could still walk around in normal shoes. It was why his Quirk was their brand of just perfect enough to be flashy, and good, and not frightening like some animal Quirks were seen as.

"You're going to be going through withdrawal for a while," Recovery

Girl told him grimly, lips pursed. "With how long you've been on this type of medication, there's no predicting how your Quirk will react. You may have a light withdrawal that tapers off, with lesser side effects. Or it may be more severe. Your Quirk may manifest further, at a slow rate, or very quickly, so as to catch up on years of missed growth. I would suggest you stay with someone for a few days at least."

"You can stay with us," Hizashi said instantly, setting a steadying hand on his shoulder. Eraserhead was lingering by the door, looking like he wanted to murder someone, but that wasn't too out of the ordinary these days. "Is there something you can give him to help? Some kind of sedative?"

"I'd rather not," Keigo blurted out, flushing when they all looked at him. "A-a sedative, I mean."

He didn't have good memories associated with being sedated.

Aizawa's simmering just got angrier. Recovery Girl and Hizashi both gave him sympathetic looks, and he tried to ignore the shame trying to crawl its way up his spine.

"It'll be fine," Hizashi assured him, and Keigo tried to believe him.

Momo didn't feel well.

Her classmates were all happy enough when they left school that day, grinning and telling jokes and waving to each other as they split up to go their separate ways. She found herself instead almost nervous to go home. It wasn't a feeling she'd ever experienced before. All logic told her she shouldn't be nervous- that there was nothing wrong.

But a tiny, bad feeling had been building in her gut all through English. She'd even skipped her daily math debate with Tenya. Kyouka had given her a slightly worried look when they went home, asking if she was all right, and Momo had smiled and said she was fine, but in truth, all day she'd been wondering.

Because she'd overheard something she hadn't been supposed to.

She hadn't meant to eavesdrop on Aizawa-sensei and Mic-sensei- it just sort of happened accidentally. She'd been seeking her homeroom teacher out during lunch, because she had a question about the homework he'd assigned, and she had a knack for finding him when

he was hanging around school. Momo was a smart girl. She paid attention, and he tended to linger in lesser-used hallways to nap. She'd just been about to come around a corner when she'd heard them talking. Talking about the assassination attempts on Izuku, her friend, and how they hadn't been able to suss out just who in the Commission had been involved.

She'd taken a step back. Felt her stomach drop. Quietly returned to the cafeteria and told herself she should just forget, because clearly this wasn't her business, and she needed to let the teachers handle it.

But then she'd started to think.

The first time it happened was during Izuku's trip to the mall with her and Ochako. Then it was during their class field trip. Then their battle simulation. At first glance, not much connected the three incidents, but her mind made a tenuous connection.

Her.

She texted Ochako and asked if she'd told anyone where they were going shopping that day. She hadn't.

Izuku said he'd only told his mother.

Momo had mentioned it, however, during dinner with her parents and uncle.

Then, their field trip- surely their parents had all known, and thus others might have as well, but the simulation? She knew the class generally didn't discuss every detail of their Hero training with their parents. She herself didn't- she'd only mentioned the training exercise the day before it happened at dinner again because she was talking about how her Quirk was coming along.

Momo tried to assure herself that surely she was just seeing things, just being paranoid, but her uncle worked for the Commission, and he'd known about the shopping trip and the battle simulation. And the field trip...Momo hadn't told him directly, but she'd spoken on the phone with Kyouka about it in her room, and her uncle stayed across the hall from her when he stayed overnight.

Her uncle's Quirk gave him enhanced hearing. He could, in general, hear a television going from a few doors down.

It was ridiculous, but even if it was all nonsense...Momo couldn't get

what Izuku had said out of her head.

It was more than what he said just that day, really. It was what she'd learned from him since the day she'd met him.

There may not be danger, but what if there was?

Someone may not be dangerous, but what if they were?

Momo's uncle may not have put her classmate in danger, but what if he had?

The very possibility was enough to have to take it seriously, because if she didn't-

It was always worse if it turned out to be true.

No one had known about that shopping trip. What were the odds that criminals had just come across them randomly, versus the odds of her Commission-employed uncle being the part in the Commission her teachers were looking for?

But why? *Why, why, why?*

She needed answers. She only had one way to get answers. She had to get them herself.

Keigo felt too hot when he woke up.

He didn't quite remember what was going on, at first. All he felt was a cold sense of fear gripping him just like every night he'd gone to bed in his Commission-owned room as a kid and dreamed about falling into a pit of darkness and not being able to fly out. He sat there on Aizawa's couch, having tossed his blanket off in his tossing and turning, and stared through the gap in his feathers, as he'd wrapped his wings around himself, at the light shining in the window.

"Hey," a quiet voice whispered. "You okay?"

Keigo didn't answer. He didn't know if he could. But a weak trilling noise exited his throat, and suddenly, his mind was blank. The emptiness felt like utter bliss. He wasn't thinking about the Commission, or his training, or what his Quirk might do to him, or anything, anymore.

"Gimme your hand," the voice continued, and Keigo did, opening his

wings up enough to do so, and then, suddenly, he was back in Aizawa's living room, and that purple-haired kid from his class was sitting on the coffee table in front of him with Keigo's hand in his.

He turned Keigo's hand over and started tapping his palm. It was in a different place each time, and he found his fingers twitching in surprise. Then he started drumming each of his fingers in Keigo's palm in a steady rhythm.

"This is how I always distracted myself after a nightmare," Hitoshi told him, not looking him in the eye. He seemed relaxed, and it somehow put Keigo at ease. "I did that too...I scratched myself sometimes, trying to hug myself, because I was digging in so hard."

The tapping on his palm was somehow distracting Keigo from thinking of the fact he was burdening a fifteen-year-old with comforting him. He didn't want to be a burden to anyone. He should never be a burden, Sotaru had said, over and over.

"You good?"

Keigo broke out of his quiet stupor and weakly cleared his throat. "Yeah," he whispered, slowly retracting his hand and letting his wings relax. "It's...it's fine."

"Nah, it's not," Hitoshi said with a shrug, but it was said so casually it didn't feel threatening at all. He set his chin against one fist and let out a tired-sounding sigh. "It's fine till it starts to hurt, I guess, but it's never really fine. Here, this was on top of the fridge."

He picked a blanket up off the coffee table and handed it to him. Keigo flushed, realizing his wings must have thrown it so far. Yawning, Hitoshi got up and edged over to the loveseat, settling down and looking exhausted. He was small enough he could curl up comfortably on the smaller sofa. "I'll sleep with you for a while. Helps not being alone."

Keigo thought about his room growing up. The plain white walls and floor. The bed, empty of anything but an Endeavor plush. How stale the air had felt.

"Thanks," he whispered, gently laying himself back down and pulling the blanket up to his chin.

Hitoshi was already drifting off. Keigo listened to the sound of his breathing, trying to match it, becoming slower and calmer. In, out. In,

out.

His eyelids eventually drifted shut too.

Peering from the entry to their room, Hizashi let out a relieved sigh at the fact they had both managed to fall asleep. Hitoshi had beat him to the punch rushing to help Keigo after his nightmare, and he would go put a blanket over the boy now, but leave him in the living room. Even in their sleep, someone else being there really would help.

He would know.

Most of the time, those who helped hurt kids tended to have once been hurt kids, after all.

The door to the office suddenly seemed much more intimidating than it ever had before.

Momo stood there in her pajamas, chewing on her lip, before giving herself a good shake and stepping forward. She knocked as she opened the door, not waiting, and as usual when he stayed over, her uncle Eiichii was sitting at the desk, face lit up by the light of his computer screen, in the middle of typing something out. He looked up and raised an eyebrow. She usually wouldn't enter without being called in first, let alone at this time of night. "Momo? Is something the matter?"

It was said with concern and care. Not quite the amount most people would show, maybe, because her uncle had always been an exceptionally composed man, but for a brief moment, she felt guilty about what she was about to ask. Maybe he was innocent. Maybe she just needed some sleep. Maybe she was about to harm his feelings with a horrid accusation.

But maybe she was right.

"I have a question," she said, stepping fully inside and closing the door. *Make it harder to escape.* Eiichii's eyebrow climbed higher on his face. "I have heard some rumors at school about the case involving my friend Izuku, uncle. They said the Commission had something to do with it. I am wondering if you know anything about it."

Keep it vague. Let him reveal himself on his own.

Eiichii's expression became carefully blank.

"Why, that's baseless, Momo. You're a smart girl, I figured you would know that, surely?"

He'll attempt to flip it backwards.

"Unfortunately government corruption is not in fact an impossibility, as history is ripe with it," she said, her voice distant and empty to her own ears. *Show nothing.* "Did you have something to do with the attempts on Izuku's life, uncle?"

Make him answer directly.

Eiichii slowly stood up, giving her a calculating look. "Momo, that's ridiculous. You should go to bed now, I'm sure you're just tired."

Avoidance.

She was only doing what Izuku would do.

She'd seen him do it to other people, even if it was on massively lesser scales, after all.

Momo held out her hand as she felt something raise itself up inside her. Strangely, she didn't feel upset, or sad, or betrayed. She felt nothing at all. It was like a wall had built itself around her emotions, keeping her from feeling anything that would distract her from what needed to be done. *People could get hurt, after all.*

Eiichii's expression hardened as a bo staff exited her palm. She took it with a relaxed grip. Clutching onto one's weapon so tightly they might get thrown off balance if it was knocked aside was a beginner's mistake, after all. "Momo, I am warning you not to do this. You will regret it in many ways."

"I am assuming there is information on that computer that may tie you to this." There weren't windows in the office, considering its location in the house, so he had no option for escape but the door. She would go for a sweep to the legs first, to throw him off balance. If a strike to the head failed and he attempted to counter-act a hasty dodge back towards the door and another strike to the sternum. "I will be taking it and calling my teachers here. You may peacefully give up now if you wish."

"Do you want to be arrested for vigilantism, Momo?"

"Whatever are you talking about, uncle?" Momo asked, some distant

part of her brain recognizing the almost disturbed look in Eiichii's eyes at her continued blankness. "I keep many bo staffs in my room for self defense, and the security cameras in here have been turned off. I have not used my Quirk at all. Now then, please put your hands in the air where I can see them."

Trap him.

She was a smart girl, after all.

Eiichii did not. He thought he could beat her, because she was a girl, because she was a teenager, but Momo was better. He had no Quirk on his side. He was not prepared for how mercilessly she struck out at him, the emptiness in her gut protecting her from any hesitation.

He had hurt her friend.

That couldn't be forgiven, after all.

The numbness lingered while Momo sat in the desk chair with her staff in hand, Eiichii tied up and leaning against the wall, occasionally moving the mouse on the computer to make sure it didn't go to sleep and lock itself while she waited for Aizawa-sensei to arrive. And he did, in record time, capture weapon thrown on hastily over the clothes he must have slept in, and he gave her an incredulous expression when he saw her.

"Hello, sensei," she greeted. "My uncle's email is still open. I assume you will want to keep his laptop plugged in and awake until someone can scan it for information. May I wait upstairs? I am a bit tired."

And as she walked out, past a stunned, blinking Midnight, also in pajamas with her whip in hand, she still felt nothing.

He hurt Izuku.

Keigo was still pretty under the weather the next day when he arrived at school to watch class 1A. Aizawa was busy, apparently talking with Nedzu and police, because Yaoyorozu's fucking *uncle* was the Commission contact who had upped the hit on his chick, and this was all going to be such a shitshow. He sat at the desk letting the class do whatever they wanted and making sure no one fell out a window whilst feeling like his eyelids were actually bricks.

"I can't believe your uncle would do something like that," Ochako said, sounding sad as several students clustered around Momo's desk. She, too, looked disappointed, and Kyouka had a comforting hand on her shoulder.

"I know. It's very disappointing. He should work for the betterment of society, after all, and to do something so villainous...it's very much a shame." She shook her head and sighed. "But this is for the best. He is dangerous, and who knows what else he might have done..."

"I am so sorry, Momo," Tenya said gravely. "I cannot imagine what it must feel like to have such a villain for a relative."

"*I* am the one who is sorry," Momo countered, looking sympathetic as she turned and reached out to take Izuku's hand. He was stood beside her desk, and looked surprised when she did. "I am so sorry about this mess, Izuku. I know I am not to blame, but for my own uncle to have helped cause it..."

"It's okay, Momo, really. I'm fine, after all."

Momo found herself smiling.

That was true, after all. He was all right. And to her, that was all that really mattered.

Keigo knew exactly what would happen before it did. That very day, Yuuei's legal staff had started to act, raking what information from Eiichii's laptop they could. It was only enough to implicate him and the two superiors who had signed off on the hit, and the Commission cut them loose immediately, claiming they'd acted on their own and supporting their arrest. After all, why would the Commission want *All Might's* son dead? The metaphorical air between the HPSC and Yuuei was tense enough to be cut through with a chainsaw. It was a cold war at a stand still, and the HPSC clearly knew Yuuei was gunning for them, yet even they couldn't pin something on an entire high school run by Nedzu of all people (er, animals).

He still had a pounding headache when he heard Aizawa enter the staff lounge. He knew it was him judging by his footsteps. Keigo followed him around every day, after all, so he could recognize them by now. His gait was heavier than Yamada's, even though they didn't differ much in weight, because of how he walked.

"Hey, listener," Yamada greeted, his lighter footsteps following his

husband's. Opening his eyes, Keigo looked up, realizing they must have come to talk to him since the lounge was otherwise empty. Smiling, Hizashi took a few bounding steps forward and slid into a spot on the couch across from him.

"Hey," Keigo replied tiredly, feeling a thread of nervousness. "Is something up?"

"Not at all. Well, kind of. But nothing to worry about!"

Shouta sat down beside his husband, looking ragged. There was a clipboard in his hands. A furrow developed in Keigo's brow as the two men shot each other a glance, Shouta only moving his eyes.

"Okay, I guess I'll just say it," Hizashi began, before Shouta simply slapped the clipboard down and shoved it across the table at him, making him jump. The voice hero put a hand to his face and sighed.

"Uh..." Hesitantly, Keigo turned the clipboard around and squinted at what the papers were. After a moment, he frowned. "Adult...adoption?"

What the hell?

They couldn't possibly mean me...?

"Listen," it was, surprisingly, Aizawa who said, face grim and forcing Keigo to look him in the eyes. "The Commission is dangerous right now. I know that you're afraid. You haven't got a single emergency contact or relative, and this is one more way we can protect you from their influence. I *will* make sure they don't touch a hair on your head again."

Keigo's feathers fluffed up as heat pooled in his face. His eyes darted away from Aizawa's gaze in embarrassment. He felt a little awkward in his job, trailing after the man, but he sounded like he *did* care, very personally. Maybe...maybe he didn't say much, but didn't actually dislike him...

Hizashi reached out and placed a hand over his on the table. "I know it may seem kind of awkward," he said, giving him a half-smile. "I mean, we barely scrape by with the age requirement. Shou's just a month shy of not being ten years older than you. So I know it may feel a bit weird, and we aren't saying you have to look at us or treat us like your parents. But if there's ever a situation where your next of kin needs to be contacted, we want you to have someone. You being so

isolated is how the Commission kept a hold on you. And it's totally okay if you don't want this- or if you'd rather someone else do it. But we want you to have this kind of support."

Keigo gnawed on his lip. It was only for the benefits, he thought, that they were offering- yet some small part of him was embarrassed to actually, kind of, almost...want to take it the way Hizashi had just stated he didn't have to take it. He could barely remember his mother. He remembered the smell of alcohol and a harsh gaze, her giving him up to the Commission. He didn't remember much of his father at all. He'd never been given the luxury of parents who cared about him.

But he'd been given so much, here at Yuuei. Freedom- friends- a chance at happiness.

"Um...well..." The feathers growing at his hairline had puffed out too at this point, making his hair appear even more unruly in their attempts to reach back and cover his red ears, and he coughed awkwardly into his hand. "I wouldn't...mind."

He could *feel* Hizashi light up, and he just hoped neither of them noticed the slight hope in the slump of his shoulders as the older man searched his pockets for a pen. "That's great! I promise that this only needs to be what you want it to be. We want you to be safe, and comfortable, and that's what matters, all right?"

He pulled out a Present Mic-themed pen with three different options for ink color and clicked it to black. And Keigo signed, pretending his hand wasn't shivering, and pretending if it was it was due to his still shaky state of withdrawal.

Shouta threw back another shot of tequila, grimacing at the taste. Frankly, he was only drinking it *because* it tasted so shitty, and it distracted him from pretty much everything going on in his life right now.

"Careful there, friend, you don't want too bad of a hangover!" Atsuhiro, who'd given him his number after the Endeavor incident, and invited him to drink if he felt like ramming his head into a wall again, exclaimed. Somehow, it had been quite clear it wasn't a flirtatious offer. It felt more like the man understood his unique pain of constantly having to run around after people younger than him trying to make sure they didn't accidentally stab themselves with something.

The bar he apparently co-owned with someone by the name of Kuro was empty except for the two of them. It was kind of a hole in the wall, but Shouta had drank in much, much worse places in his younger years.

He set his glass down and glared into it, feeling an intense urge to bite into the glass and chew to get his bitterness out. By now, the news had already gotten ahold of the Eiichii story, so he could freely talk about it. "I'm going to ram a knife up the Commission's ass," he muttered angrily, pouring himself more to drink.

"Oh? You don't believe their statement, that those operatives were acting on their own?" Atsuhiro asked, in an odd, light tone, like he was awaiting Aizawa's answer eagerly. It wasn't really the alcohol that made Shouta spit out his response, though. He was just that far past giving a shit.

"Oh, trust me," he sneered. "That entire fucking organization is full of fucking filth. It's rotten to the goddamned fucking *core*."

(One thing alcohol did do, however, when he was mad, was make him swear more, which Hizashi found hilarious.)

Atsuhiro smiled, and it was a vaguely curious smile. "It's strange to hear a Pro Hero say such a thing."

Shouta snorted.

"All Pros aren't the shine and spotlight you see on fucking TV," he explained, taking another swig. "Half those shits are just useless should-be dropouts who only care about fame and glory. Underground operates different. Most of us don't like the fucking HPSC."

Atsuhiro eyed him, interested, out of the corner of his eye, swirling around the liquid in his own glass.

"You know," he said, with a different sort of smile, "you sometimes strike me as, shall we say, a sort of vigilante with a license running about, Eraserhead."

"Oh, please," Shouta, someone who'd tried to use anything from his fists to random objects that could be used as weapons lying around to defend people since he was fourteen, even if it had taken him years to learn how to do it effectively, sneered again, voice mocking. "As if I've never done *'vigilante work.'*"

Atsuhiro chuckled, sounding absolutely delighted, and Shouta pulled himself a taller glass off the shelf for some wine to alternate with water. He didn't need to be coming back to the apartment sloshed, after all. He was only taking a light break because Nemuri was there to help Keigo and Hitoshi get to sleep, considering how stressful a day it had been, and Miruko had dropped by to spend some time with her friend.

"I may be doing more, considering what they've done to my latest problem child," he muttered darkly.

Atsuhiro set his glass down and his chin into one palm. "Oh? Do tell."

"I adopted a traumatized twenty-two year old with wings."

"Wings, you say?"

Chapter End Notes

> keigo, as he's literally in the process of being adopted: man, i hope these guys don't think i look up to them in like a fatherly way or anything...
>
> also compress and aizawa are complete wine buddies (cough wine mom club cough) now, you can't change my mind

we'll be fine

It was Saturday night. Shouta had left the bar, and he was swinging his way home when he caught sight of a flash of blue coming from the seventh level of an apartment building. He couldn't quite see what was going on inside, but he did see the figure that was thrown from a window, curled in on itself to try and avoid some damage, and the blonde hair was a dead giveaway.

He altered his course and swung in through the alley, catching Toga Himiko midair and coming to a mildly rough landing on the ground because of how high up they'd been. There were still sounds of fighting above, but they were muted.

Toga had frozen like a small rabbit that had been hit in the head and didn't know what to do. Still crouching there, cradling her head in one hand- not giving people whiplash had been one of the first things he'd had to learn when he learned how to rescue in midair- he watched through his goggles as she slowly started to blink at him.

"Mr. Eraserhead?" she asked, sounding hesitant and confused. "Where did you come from?"

"I was on my way home," Shouta told her dryly. "Am I right to assume the League is fighting someone up there?"

"Well, yeah, but it's not heroes!" the girl exclaimed, suddenly regaining some of her enthusiasm. "They're these weaklings who showed up in the city to try and form a gang and like going after little kids."

The girl didn't even completely understand what she was saying. But to Shouta, it made a stone drop in his gut and his teeth gnash together. It must have been the Quakes, he thought- a rather cheesily named group that had just popped up and whose primary fighters used earthquake-like Quirks to send tremors through air and water. Heroes hardly knew about them, but the Underground did, and several of his contacts (including a few vigilante ones) had been planning on stopping in to give them a visit.

...Well, there wasn't much of a difference between that and this, was there?

The door ahead of them busted open. "Toga!" someone yelled out

worriedly, followed by the sound of running footsteps as the lizard Quirked one ran out. He was followed by Shigaraki, who froze when he saw Shouta, and then the buff woman and warper dropped out of a portal overhead.

The warper tilted his head at him. His eyes seemed to squint, not suspiciously, but like he was thinking back to who Aizawa was.

"E-Eraserhead?" Shigaraki finally stammered, yes, *stammered*, one hand rubbing his neck in an odd motion as he stood there. "What are you..."

"*Togaaaaaaa!"* finally came the voice of the man Shouta had deduced Toga seemed rather attached to, as he burst out of a window on the first floor audibly sniffling and sobbing. "Oh, you're fine! *Of course she's fine, she's a fucking badass!* I was so worried, I'm so sorry I didn't stop that guy from throwing you- *that's because you're useless, asshole-!"*

His voice warbled and shifted through his entire charade. Sighing, Shouta set the girl down, and he felt the warper's eyes dart to his hand, where it held her head so carefully.

"Thanks, Mr. Eraserhead!" she giggled out cheerfully, then skipped over to comfort the masked man and start patting his hands. "I'm fine, Jin, Mr. Eraserhead caught me!"

Jin. Shouta made a mental note to write that down later.

He gave a vague nod and turned to swing his weapon at a pipe overhead to vault himself up. It was a triage situation, like last time, after all. Go to the most important goal first. He wasn't able to fight them all by himself, and there were probably villains still up there alive to capture, and what kind of hero would let child molesters get away? And the League wasn't a threat, not right now.

"Uh-" the large woman asked, sounding hesitant. "Aren't you going to...try and...arrest us?"

Shouta looked back at her and stared, somehow exuding both blankness and intensity through his goggles that made the one called Jin let out an exaggerated shiver. He gave it a moment, like he was thinking about it.

"No," he finally said, and then left, because it was late, and he wanted to get home to his husband, son, and legally adopted bird.

Inko blinked up at the large, intimidating figures in front of her with palpable confusion.

"You're...erm...moving into our building, Mr...Ectoplasm, sir?"

One of the men let out an awkward cough. "Tha's right," he muttered, pulling his cowboy hat down to try and hide more of his face. "There was, uh, an opening."

She blinked again.

"It's very close to the school," said Ectoplasm, in his civilian wear, though his eyes were darting anywhere but hers.

"It's uh...real easy commute."

"Well," Inko said after another awkward moment of silence, because it wasn't just every day two of her son's teachers randomly showed up to live in their building, tucking her newspaper under her arm and taking a sip of her tea. "It's...always nice to get a new couple in the building. I hope you enjoy your stay!"

"Thank yeh, ma'am..."

"I can't believe you adopted a kid and didn't even tell me!" Naomasa complained at him over the phone. "We're friends, aren't we, Toshi? I mean, I think I've seen him from a distance and all considering how much I've been working with Yuuei recently, but I barely know him! How am I supposed to get him a birthday gift in so little time?"

"I was going to tell you," Toshinori offered as a weak excuse, wincing when Naomasa sighed. It was *The Sigh.* The *you're such an idiot, Toshi, but I put up with it anyway* sigh. "The class is supposed to be holding some type of parent-teacher mixer, next week, if you'd like to come? I can bring a guest..."

"I'd be glad. I'm only surprised Dave didn't beat me to the punch."

Toshinori winced again. After Dave's initial *Why didn't you send me even an email?!* reaction, he'd gone off about how *This is great, Toshinori, Melissa is about the same age! Our children can be friends just like we were back in the day! You've really got to come visit soon!* "Believe me, if he could afford to get on a plane right now and come over here overnight he would."

"Well...did Torino call you yet?"

Toshinori coughed, even though he hadn't really felt the need to in a while, and turned in his chair so he was huddled into his desk. "Not yet," he whispered. "It makes me nervous. Surely he must have heard..."

"Haha. What about Mirai?"

"N...not yet either..."

"Oh, Toshi. I feel sorry for you."

"So do I," Toshinori said, a little miserably, and Naomasa hung up the phone snickering at him.

It was a Sunday morning. His day off. Relaxation day. And Keigo felt terrible.

He'd managed to not wake anyone up as he puked up his dinner and dry heaved the whole night, tossing the evidence into the trash bin on the street with a feather, but now all he could do was lay on the couch sweating as his body somehow shivered from being cold. There were feathers scattered around him. They'd started falling off in the middle of the night, not obeying his commands, and he'd curled in tighter on himself, whimpering as he bit into his tongue hard to keep from yelling for Yamada. This was his Quirk, he thought, and he'd been the one stupid enough to take what the Commission gave him all those years- he should deal with it himself-

But by morning, most of his feathers were in a mess on the floor, and he'd barely been able to control the one that took evidence of his sick downstairs. He felt ready to cry.

Scratch that, he was crying.

"Rise and shine, morning listeners- what the hell?" Hizashi said as he walked into the living room and attached kitchen from the hall, voice going from a jovial call to a high-pitched yell in a matter of milliseconds. Immediately, Keigo heard the sound of heavier, running footsteps behind him that felt too loud. Hitoshi was rushing from his room too. Keigo could hear it. It felt *too loud*. "Keigo!"

Keigo whimpered into his pillow and clutched onto it tighter, wishing they didn't have to see him in such a pathetic state. Hizashi ran over

to him, trying to dodge the feathers and not step on them, but it didn't matter. Keigo couldn't feel them. *He couldn't feel them.*

"Kiddo, talk to me here, please. What are you feeling? Hey? Can you open your eyes for me? Sit up?"

"Can't," Keigo choked out, feeling the looming presence of Shouta and Hitoshi coming up behind them and- *he wasn't supposed to do this, not in front of people not-* "Can't."

Hizashi leaned over him, his eyebrows pulled together in concern. He put a hand to Keigo's forehead and eyed the pillow.

"Are you stress gripping that?"

"Not supposed to," Keigo whispered, feeling pitiful and stupid and *angry*. He didn't *want* to feel this fucked up. He didn't *want* to feel insecure about himself because of the fucked up shit the Commission had taught him. He didn't *want* to feel ashamed about his own Quirk, and yet, here he was. He couldn't get rid of the feelings they'd instilled in him so deeply. "Not...supposed to...not in front of people...c-can't let go of it...I'm sorry-"

He stopped and devolved into a pathetic sound, one he was pretty sure wasn't human, and he felt tears slide down his cheeks.

"Shhh," Hizashi murmured, brushing his hair away from his forehead and softening his expression. "It's all right. That's just a normal raptor thing, right? That means it's just a normal thing for you."

"H-Haven't...haven't done it since I was...a kid."

"That's okay. You're just scared. But we're right here, all right? You're gonna be all right. Shhh."

Something about the man's voice was just...calming. Keigo tried to remember what he'd researched about panic attacks, in an incognito tab on a new computer in the middle of the night, and tried to match his breathing to the other Pro's.

"Can you sit up for me?" Hizashi asked, voice ever so gentle, and Keigo hesitantly nodded.

He moved his feet first. When they brushed the floor, he could feel that they'd grown longer. His talons. He was tearing the pillow, too, but as he slowly sat up, his back feeling like it was on fire, the talons

in his fingernails slowly receded.

"Holy fuck," Hitoshi muttered behind him.

Keigo tensed. "What is it?" he asked, twisting his head to try and see behind him. "Wh-what happened to-"

Hizashi grabbed his shoulders before he could grow anymore frantic. "I can't feel any of them," Keigo sobbed, reaching for that mental space that had always, to some extent, been there, and finding nothing but a few small embers. "I can't- I can't-"

"Kiddo, calm down. I think I know what's going on."

It was then another figure eased onto the couch. It was Aizawa, who didn't touch him, but looked at him with an expression so utterly unmoved and calm it almost calmed him down, even if it was a little scary.

"Keigo," he said, saying each word clearly as he held up a feather. A feather that was red, splattered with gold. "I believe you're molting."

Keigo's brain rammed into a wall, flipped over, and went crashing into a set of train tracks nearby.

"Huh?" he asked, panic forgotten in place of utter confusion.

"It's a normal process. I am guessing that, since you share traits with some type of hawk, you molt every so often as well. Many people with bird type Quirks do it. It's not like when your feathers grow back after being destroyed- it's just a new set of feathers, ones that may evolve and gain new capabilities. We don't know at this point. But right now, you just need to see Recovery Girl, and see if she can help any."

"...okay," Keigo murmured, too numb to put up any type of fuss, and let Hizashi support him as he stood up off the couch.

Later, in the school medic's office, he realized why Hitoshi had uttered a quiet *fuck* upon seeing his back. New feathers were poking out of his skin, mottled with blood, and it looked terrible. They had forced the old ones out of their way, and the new ones...they were red and gold.

Even with all of it- the pain, the stunned numbness at his realization that morning, the embarrassment- part of him was relieved. At least he hadn't lost them. At least they were coming back. At least they...might even be better than before. At least he would have his

wings again.

"Hey, big bro," Hitoshi said, sitting across from him on a chair in Recovery Girl's office, as he took a rubber mallet and bopped him on the knee. "You feel that?" He was grinning a way that, frankly, creepily reminded Keigo of Aizawa.

"*Ow,*" he complained, whining as he pulled his limbs out of reach of the little menace. After a moment, he hunched in on himself, looking away. "You...don't have to call me that."

"Why not?"

"You just...don't...I know that this is all...only for convenience...and-"

"Seriously?" He looked back up, and Hitoshi was staring at him with a dry look on his face. "My dads literally adopted you."

Keigo awkwardly tried to come up with a retort. "W-well, yeah, but, th-they said I don't have to, look at it as, well-"

It was then the privacy curtain for his cot was swept aside like a whip had just snatched ahold of it. Keigo wouldn't deny letting out a surprised screech.

"Aww, listener, I only said that so you'd feel comfortable!" Hizashi exclaimed, lower lip jutting out as he held out his arms wide. "You're a part of this family now, you hear? Time for a dad hug!"

Hitoshi immediately lunged away. "Wha-" Keigo stuttered, but he was too late. Hizashi descended on him like, ironically, a mother bird settling over the chicks in its nest (aka, leaving no room for escape), being careful of the bandages on his back to protect his new downy feathers as he trapped Keigo in a bear hug.

"Tell us about anything, okay?" he gushed, rubbing his cheek into Keigo's hair and making him flinch in surprise. "Any cut, or bruise, or problem, or-"

"He's going to be like that for ten minutes minimum," Hitoshi called from the windowsill, already opening it to try and escape, a little bit of frantic energy in his own movements. "Good luck-!"

He got the window open, but before he could jump out, Shouta's capture weapon came out of nowhere and wrapped around him, yanking him back onto his chair as he let out a squeak. "What have I

said about jumping out random windows?" Shouta asked dryly as he came into view, looking vaguely annoyed. The chair slowly spun around, showing Hitoshi looking defeated.

"Just because you do it, doesn't mean I can," he mumbled.

"Exactly." Aizawa ruffled his hair, then, terrifyingly, leaned over to do the same to Keigo, making him start to wonder if he was in the Twilight Zone. "You're one of my problem children now too. You're just old enough to babysit the others."

He was more abrupt than Hizashi, who was still smothering him with affection, but somehow, he was a little ominous too, and Keigo sat there and wondered how he'd ended up here. It didn't feel like there was any escaping this. Not that...he really wanted to. Not...

Not really.

"Look, Shou," Hizashi said, holding up one of Keigo's bangs. "He's got my hair, but these eyes are different...and *red* wings? Did you *step out on me?*"

Aizawa snorted audibly. It might've been the first time Keigo saw him do anything like laugh.

"Maybe *he* stepped out on *you*. It could've been that redhead Underground you work with," Hitoshi stirred the pot, doing his creepy Aizawa grin again. Shouta's eyebrow twitched, not because he actually believed any of this inane nonsense, but at the idea of his partner apparently getting it on with someone Keigo assumed he disliked. Hizashi began laughing, Hitoshi kept grinning, and Shouta glared, and Keigo started to second guess whether he wanted to escape or not.

Keigo was kind of feeling like shit as he made his way to the Todoroki residence.

But, well, he'd received the go-ahead to resume normal, easygoing activities even with his feathers growing in. His fever had passed- and Shouta had given him half an earful about not calling out for one of them, because it had apparently gotten quite high, but Recovery Girl suspected that the very worst of the withdrawal was passing. It still hurt like a bitch, of course, probably because he should have had his first molt years ago, but a short walk to Touya's house wouldn't hurt.

The house was literally *in his sight* when a black car with tinted out

windows pulled up beside him.

Keigo felt his stomach drop.

The door swung open. One black heel stepped out, followed by another, and Sotaru emerged from the passenger side, looking as proper as ever in a pantsuit and two-thousand-dollar watch from New York on her wrist. There was a briefcase in her hand and a friendly smile on her face Keigo knew was fake.

"Hello, Hawks. I've been trying to reach you for a few weeks now."

His stomach might as well have been under the concrete they were standing on right now.

"I'm kind of busy," he blurted out, taking a step back. Her smile tightened.

"We really need to have a discussion. I'm afraid it can't wait."

His eyes darted to Touya's house. It wasn't that far. If he ran, if he...he had no wings. He had no wings right now. He couldn't- he couldn't-

Two men dressed in plain clothes exited the back of the vehicle. They stepped out on either side of Sotaru, starting to box him in, and Keigo gulped as he backed up towards the wall behind him.

No, no, no-

There was a collar in Sotaru's hand. He knew what it felt like. He knew what it felt like to feel his wings go dead, to feel his senses slowly die until he felt like he had drowned, to feel...*nothing*. To feel his wings, his *limbs*, limp on a bed behind him, unable to move.

"Don't make this difficult, Hawks."

A sudden chill descended onto the air. Keigo raked in a gasping breath, at first thinking it was his imagination, but then a white and black figure swirled into place in front of him. Fuyumi, dressed in a long black coat, with a heavy-looking purse in her hand, was standing in front of him, eyes narrow and shoulders squared.

"I would appreciate it if you do not threaten one of my friends in broad daylight," she said crisply, voice calm and controlled and yet so *cutting*. "If you come a step closer I'm going to take it as intent to threaten and assault us."

Keigo saw Sotaru draw up in surprise. Then she smiled, the smile she always used to manipulate people. "Ah. Todoroki Fuyumi, yes? I believe your brothers live down the street- I do hope nothing puts their situation in jeopardy."

"You can't threaten me with that, *bitch*," Fuyumi spat, making both Sotaru and Keigo jerk back in surprise. For the first time in a long time, Keigo saw Sotaru's expression morph into surprise and something aghast. "My father may not end up in jail, but like *hell* any of us will let my baby brother go back to him. We're all legal adults now, Touya, Natsuo and I, or did you forget? We will *all* fight for him. And when we get our mother out, and believe me, we will, she will too. You have *no idea* what a family can do to protect one of their children, and I warn you, you do not want to find out. If you want to try and levy any legal action against me, make up some sort of charge or evidence, I welcome you. I have the best lawyers this country can offer on speed dial. They're employed by Yuuei. And, *by the way,* Keigo's parents may have a *slight problem* with you abducting him off the street."

The strained, tense, blank smile that Sotaru let out when something took her off guard- something she didn't like- appeared on her face. "Pardon?"

"I'm sure you know them. Eraserhead and Present Mic. The adoption is rather recent, so I don't blame you for being in the dark."

Keigo saw it. The dark fire in Sotaru's dim orbs, one that represented anger and an offended bitterness at being outplayed, and it made him nervous. He reached out and clutched Fuyumi's sleeve.

"Now if you'll excuse us, we're leaving," Fuyumi snapped, and Keigo finally noticed the slight tremble to her hands as she took ahold of his arm and took a few steps down the street.

One of the men moved to follow. Sotaru turned, a dark look on her face, and Keigo keened.

Fuyumi threw back her head.

"RUMI!"

Keigo let out a cry and crumpled, still clinging to Fuyumi's jacket. Holy fuck, he hadn't even known she *could* scream that loud! *What the fuck!* His senses had been going back and forth all day, from dull to oversensitive, and right now, he guessed they were on the

oversensitive end.

He heard what sounded like a sonic boom. A moment later, he spotted a fuzzy shape shooting up from Touya's yard like a bullet and then towards them. Miruko landed on the sidewalk hard enough to crack it in half. She turned, steam practically rolling out of her nostrils, and her red eyes hummed with frenetic energy as she surveyed them. Fuyumi seized him by the jacket and dragged him along, heels clicking on the sidewalk as she speed-walked over to her partner, already panting from the anxiety of it all.

"Well," Rumi said, with a seemingly friendly smile as she tilted her head, "what's this?"

Keigo heard Sotaru swear. The men had already backed up. Collars no where in sight, restraints nowhere in sight, that damned smile on Sotaru's face again.

"I wished to have a discussion with Hawks, here, since I have worked with him in the Commission for many years," she said, making Rumi's eyes narrow. "I think this may all be a misunderstanding-"

"Leave."

Sotaru paused, not used to being interrupted, and squinted. "Excuse me?"

"Leave," Rumi repeated, kicking a piece of rubble up into her hand as Fuyumi dragged Keigo behind her and crushing it into dust into her hands. She narrowed her eyes at the other woman and bared her teeth, tapping her heel impatiently and grinding concrete beneath it. "I said leave, bitch, before I decide to put you in the hospital."

Sotaru's lips formed a thin line. "You can't threaten a member of the Commission like-"

A piece of concrete slammed into the car's windshield, skewering the passenger seat.

Sotaru's arms flew up to shield her face. Miruko was still staring her down, and again, for the first time, Keigo saw an expression he'd never before: she looked pale. Intimidated.

"We're leaving," she said shortly, turning on shaking feet and going towards the backseat where there was no glass.

A stalemate.

Keigo felt lightheaded. He couldn't prove they'd been there, that they'd threatened him, yet if Sotaru blabbed about Miruko threatening her, the question of just *why* she was threatening her would come up. The Commission wanted to keep things quiet. Bring him *in* quietly. Not have it all over the news. And Miruko- she was dangerous. She was in the top ten. The public wouldn't just accept her disappearing or having her license revoked for no reason. Even if the Commission managed it, Rumi had been a vigilante before. She would still come after them.

"Keigo? Can you hear me?"

Yeah, he said, or he thought he did.

Keigo hunched over Touya's bar, feeling embarrassment creep up his neck as Fuyumi gently redid his bandages. His feathers had grown several inches in but a moment when he'd stumbled in the door. He'd yelled loud enough to alert Touya and Atsuhiro in the kitchen, and he still felt like a burden, having to hide there in Touya's house because the big bad Commission had scared him.

"There we go," Fuyumi said, softly. "All finished."

"Thank you," he whispered, staring at the counter.

The unique gait of Rumi floated into his right ear as she walked over to sit beside him. "This is bullshit," she growled. "Taking people off the street? Just straight up kidnapping? What the fuck?"

"What, 'the fuck,' indeed," said Atsuhiro as he placed a small glass in front of Keigo's arms. It was full of what he recognized as his favorite type of juice. Apple-cranberry. He usually only got it at the League hideout, but Atsuhiro, who was apparently a mentor of Touya's, who'd dropped in on their bull sessions a few times to play cards and always had an easygoing smile, had seemed to notice.

He looked up and mustered a weak smile. "Thanks," he said, though it came out quieter and raspier than he'd intended. Atsuhiro's eyes seemed to burn into him as he took a sip from the glass and wrapped both hands around it.

Touya was leaning on the fridge, arms folded, blue eyes boring into Keigo's head. He hadn't moved since they'd come in. Normally he

might be...making sarcastic comments, joking, *something*, but he seemed...different.

"Birdie," he finally said, eyes drifting to Keigo's back. "Your wings. What happened?"

Keigo cringed. They all saw it.

He stared at the counter.

Hardly aware, he just said it all. What was the point in hiding it now? Wouldn't the whole world find out eventually? Find out how weak he'd been?

Fuyumi let out a shaky sigh as she leaned against the counter next to him. Subtly, she'd slipped a bottle out of her purse and threw back a pill without any water, probably trying to go unnoticed.

"It'll be okay," she murmured, but Keigo hardly heard her. All he could think about was blank white walls. Blank grey walls of the training rooms. Falling down over and over until he learned to simply not fall down. Laying in bed and having to move his wings manually to readjust himself because they were dead weight. Not questioning it when he got a plastic cup of 'vitamins' every day he had to take before training. Wanting to be a hero who shined bright-

"Keigo? Keigo?"

"I don't want to go back," he cried, no, bawled, unintentionally having slipped down further onto the counter, barely noticing as Rumi grabbed him and yanked him over to her, pressing a hand against the back of his head as she held him. "P-please don't make me go back, I'll- I'll do anything- I don't wan' to go back, I don't want- *please*, I can do better, pl-pl- don't-"

"Shhhh, baby bird," a woman's voice crooned in his ear. "It's all right. We've got you. They'll never have you again."

No, it was...Rumi. It was Rumi. And Fuyumi, holding onto his back. They were there. They were real.

He was here. He wasn't in the Commission's quarters.

"I don't want to go back," he said quietly, feeling a sudden, unsettling sense of calm. "All I ever w- wanted- was to shine as bright as the hero who saved *me*. B-but they...they let me look up to a *monster*...they

tried to make *me* a monster...I just...I just wanted to be a hero...who shone brightly."

It was, surprisingly, Atsuhiro's hand that settled on the side of his face. He was still smiling that odd smile when he guided Keigo to look at him.

"You are," he said, and somehow, it felt more real than anyone else who'd ever called Hawks a "hero."

"Hello there, Kurogiri," Compress said cheerfully as he popped into the bar, unsurprised to find his friend alone at the counter trying to cheat at their tower card game by using a warp. The man moved his hands immediately, but Compress caught it. "I have some information we need to attend to."

"What is it, Compress?" Kurogiri asked, the picture of professionalism as he erased all evidence of his cheating, and Atsuhiro smiled tolerantly as he sat down.

He placed a folder down on the bar. It was thick, needing a small binding rope to keep it closed, and unmarked saved for the label on the front in small black font that read *Confidential - Level 8 Security Clearance Required. A: B0084.*

"Oh?" Kurogiri asked, sounding interested. "What might this be?"

"Well, after an event earlier, I decided to do some digging...I dropped by the HPSC's Headquarters, you wouldn't believe how easy it was to get in! And *this* was a rather interesting find...you know our friend, Hawks?"

"Young Keigo?" Kurogiri asked, sounding wary this time.

Atsuhiro's smile became tense and uncomfortable, more like an animal baring its teeth. "Yes."

"...I see."

"Do you have anything on the schedule? It makes for a long midnight read."

Shouta was awakened on a Sunday night by tapping at his window. At first, he thought it was one of the cats scratching at the wall again, but he jerked up when he realized it wasn't. It was too loud. Too insistent.

Realizing he was still in the office, he swiveled in his chair and reached for his capture weapon, eyes narrowing as he approached the window.

He jerked it open without much preamble. There was a loud squeal as one Toga Himiko came tumbling in, smacking into the floor with a squelch.

"Mr. Eraserhead!" she whined, rubbing her head. "I was trying to be sneaky!...That was mean."

Shouta's senses were all on high alert. He knew what she was- a sixteen year old girl that didn't understand social norms, that needed help- but he also wasn't stupid. She was also a villain, even if that wasn't her fault, and she was now somehow in his apartment, where his sons and husband were sleeping.

He needed to be cautious.

"...Toga?" he asked, slowly kneeling down. "What are you doing here?"

Toga's eyes flitted up to meet his and then darted aside. "Hehe, well..." she said, fiddling with a scarf as she grinned. "Um...well...you seem like a pretty cool guy...and everyone I know is kinda busy right now...I mean, I can do things myself! But...well..." She giggled again, but he was beginning to understand she was doing it to cover something up.

His eyes narrowed. She was acting exactly like his students did when they had an injury they didn't want to fess up to. "Are you hurt?" he asked, looking her over. Now that his eyes had adjusted to the low lighting, he could see something dark coating her skirt.

A slight pout overtook her lips. "...I thought maybe you could help me with stitches?" she asked, sounding half hopeful and half like she thought herself stupid, pulling the skirt up just enough to show a nasty gash over her knee. He was sure she could have done it herself, but it wrapped around at such an angle it would have been difficult, and there were small bits of metal embedded in her skin. "But I'm not going anywhere! I'm going back to the hideout, and-"

"Okay."

She paused.

"...okay?" she asked, squinting at him.

"Wait here," Shouta instructed, standing up. She blinked up at him from the floor. "I'm going to get my first aid kit. I will not turn you into the police, and I will allow you to leave. All right?"

"...all right," she said, still blinking at him like a confused fish, and he stalked towards the door to do just what he'd said.

Police wouldn't help. Abovegrounds wouldn't. They'd throw her into jail, where she wouldn't receive any type of help and would get worse over the years. That was what they did. They helped civilians, not the hurt people lashing out that they labeled with the wide brush entitled "villain."

Above all, she was a child. A sixteen year old girl that needed help. And Shouta wanted to help, wanted to get her into a different type of life that would be better for anyone involved, but calling up the cops right here and right now wasn't the answer.

Right now, all she needed was his help. The reassurance that the first person from normal society that she had reached out to in what was probably years didn't immediately turn around and betray her.

So that was what he'd do.

never seen a swan

Chapter Notes

> p.s. for those of you interested it's actually canon in the bnha vigilantes manga that miruko was a vigilante in middle school, she slapped on a mask and beat people up until she got caught lmao i headcanon that she secretly kept up the vigilante work by defending anyone who needed it until she got her license, like aizawa did in this fic.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"What's this?" Toga asked him, poking at the bandage he wrapped around her knee, eyes alight in curiosity.

"A waterproof bandage. It will be good for three days, so you can still shower. You shouldn't need it after that."

"Wow, I never find those at the dollar store!"

"What's this?" Toga asked, rifling through Shouta's medicine cabinet above the sink and pulling pretty much every bottle down for him to explain.

"Do you not know what Tylenol is?"

"I know what it is! I just get the cheaper one, so I didn't recognize it."

"What's *this*?" Toga asked, both hands buried in the fluffy towel Shouta handed her after he'd started the warm water, eyes wide and round.

"A hydrophobic towel. It won't get wet in case you need something dry."

"I didn't know that was a thing!"

She didn't know what a lot of things were.

Shouta stood outside the bathroom door and let out a sigh as he rubbed his eyes.

"Um, Mr. Eraserhead?" she whisper-called from within. "My bun is stuck. Can you get it for me?"

"Can you cover yourself with that towel so I can come in?"

"Sure, I guess!"

He slithered into the bathroom, closing the door softly, and furrowed his brow at the girl in his bathtub. She beamed up at him, light glinting off her sharp canines. She had wrapped the towel around herself, and one of her buns was indeed stuck in some kind of mess. "Here," he said, reaching for a bottle of shampoo. And that was how he ended up sitting on the side of his bath, getting his shirt wet, shampooing the hair of a teenage fugitive while she hummed to herself and swung her feet back and forth.

"Your bathtub is really nice, Mr. Eraserhead," she said, staring down at the end with a wide smile. "You're really nice too. My dad never washed my hair for me!"

Shouta paused, glancing down at her and feeling a pang in his chest. He had sported long, messy hair since he was small, and his father had never touched it either. The closest he'd come to 'washing' it was when he'd dumped a bottle of beer on his head when he was eleven.

"Mine didn't either," he said, going back to getting the tangles out of her hair.

Distantly, he heard the faint sound of their drier going off, a quiet chiming.

"Your skirt was torn," he continued, feeling like he was running on autopilot. *What could he do? What should he do? He needed to do something.* "Do you have a spare?"

"Oh, no, I only have two outfits, so I'll just switch out when I get back home," she replied chipperly. Two outfits. Two sets of clothes. Just like Hitoshi, who'd only had two sets of jeans and T-shirts outside of his school uniform when he'd moved in.

Shouta glanced at the clock hanging above his mirror.

Well...technically, the mall was a twenty-four hour one.

"I'll go get your clothes. Dry off and try not to put too much weight on your leg."

And that was how he ended up carrying a teenage fugitive to the mall, in the dead of night, and racking up a slight bill he'd have to explain to Hizashi later on his credit card to send her 'home' with actual clothes. The poor cashier at the store she'd picked out- looking dazed

and tired- just blinked at them while they stood at the checkout, looking an absolute mess, and said nothing.

"Oh? Another new neighbor?"

Inko was, again, standing at her mailbox in her houseshoes when she spotted an unfamiliar woman walking in with a suitcase and a box in her arm. She was very pretty, with a buxom figure and violet hair and kind eyes, and she seemed so familiar. She stopped in front of the mail slot area and smiled.

"Nice to meet you! Shimura Inko, right? My name is Kayama Nemuri; I teach Izuku in art history!"

Inko blinked. The hero Midnight? After Ectoplasm and Snipe, too? Well, she supposed it wasn't that big of a coincidence... "Yes, that's me. Thank you for taking care of my son. You are...Midnight, right?"

The woman grinned brightly. "That's me!"

"Well, welcome to the building! You're, um, coworkers live here now too. Ectoplasm and Snipe...?"

Midnight's eyes darted away from her as she let out a lilting laugh. "Ahah, yeah, they told me about an opening here...I've been looking for a bigger place, you see, for me and my fiance to move into...she's Ms. Joke, you heard of her? Anyway, they mentioned it on date night, so..."

"Oh, how nice. I always say there's never too many happy families here! Or, in this case, happy couples, hehee." Inko winked at the taller woman, enjoying the embarrassed flush it brought to her face. "Maybe not for long, though?"

Midnight laughed with a bit of nervousness, hugging her box closer. "Man, you sound like my mom asking for grandbabies... But, hey, please tease Snipe and 'plasm about it too, I *love* teasing those two. They're so stoic, you know?"

"I'll be sure to mention it!"

The hideout was gloomy when Toga got back. Mr. Eraserhead was nice enough to carry her most of the way, and didn't even try to follow her the rest of the way when she'd said where to put her down,

so her leg wasn't hurting too badly when she walked in. Inside the front room, which they usually used for meetings (game nights), Mr. Compress and Kurogiri were sitting on the couch, staring at a stack of paper on the coffee table, while Spinner practically hugged the wall on the far end giving it an incredulous stare and Twice sat in one of the chairs twiddling his fingers and Magne stood beside him looking incredibly sad.

"Did someone die?" she asked excitedly, looking at each of them in tandem. It was Magne who looked up and saw her first, and her expression morphed into something incredibly pained.

"Toga, what on earth are you wearing?"

"Hm?" She looked down and then giggled, spinning in a circle. "Oh, Mr. Eraserhead bought it for me!"

Compress' eyebrow furrowed as he turned to look at her over the couch. "Eraserhead? What do you mean he bought it?"

"Well, I was near his house-"

"How'd you even fuckin' know where his house is?" Spinner muttered.

"-And I got this really bad cut from stabbing some people, so I went to ask him to help give me stitches, and he let me use his bath, and washed my hair, and then bought me clothes!" Compress' eyebrow climbed higher and higher through her little story, though he didn't look surprised in the way she'd been expecting. "He said I should have more than two outfits. Do you like it?"

"Oh, sugar," Magne murmured, eyeing her bright pink skirt, the cat-pattern sweater she wore that looked like it had gotten into a fight with a bedazzler, neon pink knee socks and bright orange shoes covered in glitter. "Does that man have *no* fashion sense?"

"I think his talents lie in other areas," Kurogiri murmured to her, then turned and gave Toga his version of a smile. "You look pretty, young Toga."

"Yay!" She spun again, and looked at the papers, curiosity overwhelming her. "But what's all that?"

"Yeah," the voice of Tomura said from behind her, as he emerged from the hallway looking tired and annoyed. "What *is* all that?"

Compress and Kurogiri gave each other a *look*.

Toga was afraid something not-very-good was going on.

The League of Villains had known the hero Hawks was a plant from the start. It was kind of obvious- after all, he was the third most popular Hero, and who would give that up? His excuse at the start that the HPSC was dirty and he actually agreed with them was flimsy. It was primarily Dabi who talked to him, at first, and the rest didn't give it much thought- until Dabi brought him to a meeting. Twice and Toga thought he was funny- he didn't seem at all like some terrible hero who was supposed to spy on and kill them- and decided to make friends with him. Hana just snorted and said she *really doubted* that Hawks would actually do anything to them, since he was "*Izuku's.*" That had been the main thing that made Tomura not particularly care about the spy part. Because if the hero was actually on Izuku's side, he had probably already been converted. At most, he was Izuku's spy, and that just meant he was a piece in his game with green bean, and another part of their game to level up. Not a *real* threat. Just something that made it all more interesting.

Then they all actually started to like him. More often than not he brought them takeout, and he was always smiling, even if it wasn't real. Plus it was funny when Toga and Spinner played a prank on him or he started sputtering after Dabi gave him bedroom eyes. Magne just thought he was a cutie, and said as much with a pat to his hair, which made him turn a hilarious shade of pink. He came to their game nights (and it was kind of convenient how easily he could save the controllers with those little feathers of his if it got out of hand, so they didn't have to keep stealing more).

Toga had a habit of playing with his wings. They were "meat buddies," or so she said, and it wasn't like Tomura actually *cared* or anything, but he would admit that he...had snuck over while the giant bird was pretty much dozing off one time because he was curious. She'd let him help comb the feathers out with his fingers. They were so...soft and fuzzy and not at all what he'd thought they'd feel like. He'd seen them cut through things on television, after all. But it wasn't like he made a habit of it!

But maybe, just maybe, Hawks wasn't like the rest of them. Maybe he actually meant it when he smiled at Jin one day and said he thought he was a good person. Maybe the time he'd almost broken his own neck dive-falling to catch Toga had been done out of real concern.

And he bickered with Spinner half the time so Tomura didn't have to, so that was convenient.

He fit in. He seemed to really fit in, and what was that Hana had written on the Evil Mastermind board? *WWID*- What would Izuku do.

Izuku would turn the "spy" over to *his* side. He would snag a piece worth twenty pawns when most were only worth one or less. He would be...strategic. It would be good if Hawks was on their side.

He bandaged Tomura's hand one time after a nasty fight. He hadn't asked, hadn't hesitated, hadn't even thought that Tomura might Decay him while he had ahold of his hand. And- just for a moment- all five fingers of Tomura's had been touching him, and...and nothing had happened.

He was a useful piece.

(He really liked Hawks, and he wanted him to stay. He wanted him to be one of them like Spinner and Toga and Dabi. He shouldn't go back to that stupid agency. He should stay with them. He was TOMURA'S player, not THEIRS-)

But as of late, he hadn't been around much. He was supposedly sick, according to Dabi, but Compress had pursed his lips when the man had said that. It made Tomura suspicious. He'd been wondering what was going on- if Hawks was possibly...actually going to betray them, or-

And then he got his answer.

"I had an enlightening talk with Eraserhead about this," Compress said grimly from the sofa across from him. "But I didn't know it was this bad. I don't think even he did. All of this...it's horrifying. Surely worse than things even most villains would do..."

His voice faded out. Maybe if there weren't pictures it wouldn't have been so bad. If all there was were words on paper. But there were pictures. Now they all knew what Hawks had looked like as a kid, with tiny bangs like the ones he had now and tiny wings. Now they all knew what he looked like as a kid all black and blue from training exercises. Wearing a collar that made his little wings go limp, like someone had cut the strings holding them up, sitting at a table looking downcast as someone whose face was obscured sat across from him, standing with a blindfold around his head as his tiny feathers tried to perform an exercise in the air-

He was a little kid, and they'd tortured him. *This was why he hated Heroes, all they did was hurt people, all they'd done was hurt him, this was why he hated them-*

"They cut his wings when he pissed 'em off," Spinner muttered, sounding nauseous. "That's sick."

Oh, but of course, there was always a *reason*. Some bullshit *reason* for their "trainings" and "punishments." Making an eight year old train for six hours straight? Preparation for the future. Using Quirk restraints? All to teach him how to use his Quirk and keep it from going out of control. Keeping him alone and isolated, that was because he was so *special* to be in their little *program.* Pushing him until he almost broke, it was to make him *perfect.* Hurting him, he had to have a good pain tolerance! After all, villains hurt people, didn't they? Villains, villains, villains, they were so horrible, so *bad*, weren't they, well, Tomura knew who the villains actually were.

Twice shrieked in surprise when Tomura ripped himself up from the sofa, which was already disintegrating under his hands, and violently threw the thing that had been in his hand when he walked in- his DS or something? He couldn't remember- into the far wall, making Toga yelp when it shattered. "This is bullshit!" he snarled, scratching at his neck with an intensity he hadn't used in weeks. "This is fucking bullshit!" So what if Hawks was *technically* a Hero? He was *theirs*, this shouldn't have happened! "I'm going to kill them, all of them, every last stupid fucking-"

"Tomura, Tomura!" Atsuhiro yelled, awfully close to his ear, and Tomura realized he'd darted around the table to grab at his wrists and keep him from digging his nails into his skin. "Calm down."

"How am I supposed to calm down?! They deserve to die for what they did! How old was he when they bought him? They've been drugging him and shit?! And now they're trying to fucking take him off the street!" The urge to itch was getting stronger and stronger, and he pulled at the hands on his wrists like a man having convulsions. "I'll kill them! Fucking-"

"The hell's going on?"

They all froze. Tomura was momentarily surprised out of his rage, and then Compress realized- oh. Yeah. This one was going to be even worse. All Tomura had done was dust a sofa, but Dabi...well, he was probably going to have a worse reaction.

"I think...maybe we should go outside?"

Dabi squinted at him from the door, a bag from a convenience store on his wrist. "The fuck for?"

"Well...we need to have a discussion. About Hawks."

Dabi tilted his head and narrowed his eyes. "What could possibly be worse than earlier?"

Oh, those were just the worst words to use, Atsuhiro thought, right up beside 'What could possibly go wrong?'

You don't have to read it all, Atsuhiro had said. You should just skim it, Atsuhiro had said. I can tell you the gist of it, my friend, Atsuhiro had said. But no, Dabi, stubborn git that he was, insisted on reading through it all, 'if it was so fucking dramatic,' and his sarcasm had slowly dribbled away as he flipped through the pages in lieu of a cold apocalyptic rage. The scariest thing was that he actually made it through the whole thing without any incident before he tossed it onto the ground, turning with a growl in his throat, and let an explosion of fire that had seemed to have been building up for several minutes out of his right palm that scorched the building across from them.

"It's the same fucking thing every time, isn't it?" he said, curling his hands into fists and looking like he wanted to hit something. "It's always a kid who gets fucked over by some asshole that wants their little fucking perfect product." He let out a dry laugh. "I thought it was bad, but man, that's even worse than what my old man did to me, save the whole burning me alive part!" He turned to Atsuhiro with a frightening smile on his face, eyes looking far away, and it concerned him more than if he'd looked angry. "Know what I bet they would've done if he hadn't turned out to be so good? Probably would've thrown him away like garbage. There had to have been others, Mister, don't you think? Bunch of little kids who couldn't cut it and bit the dust. Doesn't that sound *heroic*?"

This was a sore spot for more than one of them, Compress thought, trying not to wince as he set a hand on Dabi's shoulder. "Dabi-"

"Nah, nah, I'm fine. Say, Mister. Where'd you get that file? You got an address? I'm just curious, you know. Come on, Atsuhiro."

Atsuhiro stood there and contemplated for a moment, and sighed, and then gave Dabi the location of a certain office he'd broken into. It

wasn't the one he'd found the file in. That one was just too high-security, too hard for Dabi to get into without getting caught. Only himself and Kurogiri were truly good at infiltration.

But he did give him the office of one of Hawks' handlers, and he let the man go to blow off his anger in the only way he knew how. It didn't feel good, but there was nothing else he could do right now.

Come Monday morning, Hitoshi was pretty sure his dad had already formulated an adoption plan for that weird blonde girl he'd helped the night before. (Oh, he thought he was slick, but Hitoshi had a one-up on him: insomnia.) He couldn't deny it seemed she needed help. She sounded like she was just wandering around, without anyone to take care of her, so he decided if he saw her he would try and talk to her.

But, come Monday morning, there was a weird sensation on the air.

Finals were only a week away now. The teachers were keeping quiet about what the tests would be like, but Hitoshi got the feeling the tense air was more to do with how horrible Hawks looked when he arrived with Present Mic. He hadn't slept well, Hitoshi knew that himself, but something had happened he wasn't talking about. He seemed to stick closer to Aizawa's side than usual. He didn't go anywhere alone, either.

Eventually, though, Hitoshi got an opening, because his dad had to go talk to the principal- again- and left Keigo to watch 1A while they drew in coloring books in various places on the floor and discussed what they were planning for their English final to write about.

He slithered up to the desk, where Keigo was practically asleep as he leaned against his hand, and subtly tapped the wood with his foot. The man jumped and shook himself, looking startled for a moment, and pulled on a half-smile when he saw him. "What's up, chick?"

"That's what I'm asking, bro," Hitoshi said, specifically because he knew it embarrassed Hawks, and raised an eyebrow. "Something's up with you. What is it?"

Keigo's eyes slid to the side. "It's nothing," he said, after a moment. "Just...problems with the Commission. Stuff for the adults to worry about. It's fine, I promise."

Yeah, right, Hitoshi thought, but let it go. He knew pushing wouldn't help.

"Well, if everything's fine, that means you have time to come over and help me with my math homework."

"Huh? Wa-"

It was too late. Hitoshi had already grabbed him by the elbow, and was dragging him towards Ochako and Izuku's pillow pile, which he would end up passed out in, because there was no math homework.

Keigo's apartment had been upgraded with the best security system Power Loader could offer. It helped that he lived down the hall from two Pros, one with a slowly degrading metaphorical trigger finger, so he didn't expect any trouble that evening. He was tired, and he wanted to go to bed, but he knew he'd just wake up in the middle of the night if he went to sleep too early, so he reluctantly settled in on his couch and turned on the television.

About halfway through some kind of cooking show that was starting to make him salivate over fried chicken, he saw a flash out of the corner of his eye. Pausing, he turned and watched for it again, groaning when he realized what it was.

"Come on, Dabs, I'm tired tonight," he muttered to himself, making himself get up, march over to the balcony, punch in the code needed to open it, and step outside. He squinted down at the street, where all he could see was a vague figure standing in the alley below.

He sighed again.

He closed the door behind him and started climbing down the fire escape. It really was a bitch, not having his wings, especially feeling as crappy as he did. Sure, he'd gotten them chomped off or burnt off or spent them up before, but they'd grown back overnight; he'd never gone so long without them, and it was affecting his balance. As soon as he hit the pavement, he wavered, and grabbed the pipe again for stability.

All right, don't fall on your face in front of Dabi.

He turned and made his way across the street. He squinted at the alley, but it was like Dabi was *trying* to be creepy this evening, because he just retreated further into it.

"Okay," he said as he stepped around the corner, "what's the deal-"

"Come with me," Dabi said, voice low and raspy, and then he'd grabbed Keigo's elbow and dragged him through a warp portal before he even had time to say anything.

Keigo yelped when he stumbled into the League's makeshift living room. Dabi's hand was still on his arm, not letting go, and it didn't feel like he was about to, because he was just standing there, scowling. Upon looking up, he saw that the entirety of the League- save for that new recruit they'd just got, what was it? Ketchup? Mustard?- was there, all of them just.

Staring at him.

Toga and Twice, with watery eyes, Spinner staring in his direction but not looking him in the eyes, Kurogiri standing at the doorway with his hands folded like he was at some kind of funeral, Magne curled up on the sofa in the back looking gloomy, and Mr. Compress on a chair facing them looking solemn as he sat forward with his arms on his knees. Tomura looked up when they arrived, sitting on the coffee table, because the other couch was dusted for some reason, and he scowled as soon as he saw him.

A stone dropped into Keigo's stomach. "Um..." he said, frantically moving his eyes back and forth between them all. "I-is something...wrong...?"

"Is something *WRONG*?" Tomura immediately yelled at him, standing up and moving to grab something to wave at him. "*This* is what's wrong!"

"What Tomura means," Compress quickly cut in, standing to take the-folder?- in Tomura's hand into his own and step towards him. "Is...we know what the Commission has done to you, Hawks."

His voice was oddly soft. Gentle. Like he was dealing with a scared animal that may run away at any moment.

He finally looked down at the folder. His heart dropped when he saw the label.

"Where'd you get that," he whispered, a cold sense of horror dawning on him. Oh no. Oh *no.* This- this was-

"Somewhere very hard to get into. But what's inside-"

"You can't have that. You can't. Now they'll- they'll-" Against his will,

moisture began gathering in his eyes as Keigo veered backwards and stopped at the limit of Dabi's arm length. His heart rate was beginning to speed up. The room was starting to feel warm again. "They'll-"

"I can assure you they won't think it was you, Hawks-"

"Th-that's not what I *mean*!" Keigo shrilled, making Compress stop and frown. "You don't get it- you don't understand-"

"Look, we know that they fucking tortured you, basically, and brainwashed you to be their hero chump or whatever," Spinner finally said, apparently growing impatient as he frowned. "But you don't gotta follow them-"

"That's not what I *mean!* It doesn't *matter*! It- it doesn't matter if I'm loyal or not," Keigo cried, staring at the folder with such a sense of horror they all began to grow quiet. "I could be the most loyal agent in the world, and it wouldn't- wouldn't fucking matter, because my file got out, and if that happens- protocol- it *doesn't matter,* they're going to kill me now. They're *going* to kill me. They're- they'll- they-"

It wouldn't have mattered to him six months ago. Not when he'd been alone. He might have been upset, he thought, but he would have accepted his fate and been resigned. But now...

Now that he had friends, now that he had a family, now that he felt what *love* was like, now that he'd felt *hope*-

Now that he had actually felt all of the things he'd never been afforded growing up-

It was so much worse. It was like having a life dangled in front of him only to be snatched away in the cruelest way possible.

The hand on his elbow loosened. Outside of his notice, tears had started dribbling down his cheeks, and now they all looked worried. Pitying. No, no, this wasn't how things were supposed to go-

And Compress...he looked *guilty*. His eyes were shining with a dim understanding of what Keigo meant. Now he knew. He'd taken the file, and that meant...

"No they won't."

Keigo sucked in his breath, startled. The room turned as one, in surprise, and he found Armament standing in the doorway, her hood

and dark hair covering her eyes. But when she raised her head, just a bit, he caught a glint of red, like Tomura.

"Listen, big bird," she said, her familiar sarcasm somehow calming him down a percentage. "You have more people in your corner than you realize. Yuuei, Eraserhead, the League...me. And, well..." A wide, wide grin stretched over her face, looking, somehow, a bit deranged. "You have no idea how long I've been wanting to destroy the Commission down to the last fucking computer they've got. A lot of people feel that way. You know what this is?" She gestured at the folder, tilting her head down again and pulling something from her pocket. It was some type of cheap smartphone she was holding with her pinky out. "Evidence. Does everyone want to take a poll on who we give it to?"

They were all silent for a moment. And then- then Keigo realized she was *right*. His file...it was one of the most guarded pieces of information the Commission had. He had no idea how Compress had even gotten it. But computers failed, power outages happened- paper files had to be kept in some way, and thus files for people like him were kept locked up in the darkest bowels of whatever hellspace the Commission chose. And they could *claim* it was all doctored, but there was proof in it- pictures. Forms signed by handlers. Medical records. Testing results.

If a courtroom put someone to the test under a truth Quirk, it could be proved true.

"Mr. Eraserhead!" Toga gasped out, like she'd suddenly grasped what Armament meant.

The grin returned. "Ding-ding-ding," she said, whirling one finger like Toga had won a prize. Then she turned and pressed a few buttons on her phone, walking out into the hall again. "Careful getting home. I have a lot of work to do."

Then she was gone, and he was left standing there, awkwardly, realizing his face was still wet- why was he *crying* so much lately- and he wiped at it in embarrassment and gently pulled his arm away from Dabi. The other man eyed him, looking contemplative.

Then he realized. "But- wait-" he stammered, looking back to Compress and Tomura. "Why...tell me this?"

Compress' eyebrows rose in surprise, and he looked back at Tomura, who eyed him and then Keigo. Kurogiri looked down at his charge as if expecting a certain sort of answer.

Finally, he huffed. "You're one of ours now, pigeon, whether you like it or not. The League of Villains...that belongs to someone else. Consider yourself part of...*my* League."

And...that felt like it had a lot more to unpack than he knew, but Keigo didn't want to question it, not when his back was already aching again under the bandages Recovery Girl had given him as his fledgling-like wings grew.

A hand settled on his shoulder. It was Dabi, he realized, still so quiet and just staring at him with intense blue eyes, so unlike how he usually was, and Keigo realized he was moving him towards a chair to sit down. Toga ran over to him instantly to hop into his lap and give him a hug, telling him over and over that they wouldn't let anything at all happen to him, and Keigo thought...that maybe, maybe this was all right.

(And wait, how did Aizawa know them?)

Armament: Good evening, Principal. Having a nice night?

Lamina: I am, though I am surprised to receive a message from you, Armament! You've made quite the cyber splash lately. I admit I'm impressed by you- you're the first person I've never been able to hack.

Armament: I'm flattered. By the way, I had a guess- stoat?

Lamina: Ah.

Armament: But, I'm not here for fun talk. Tomorrow you'll be receiving something from one of your associates...I'm sure you're smart enough to guess, but I'll just tell you it's EH, who will probably be pissed off the whole day. You might consider getting him a Xanax prescription. But anyway. I have an offering.

Lamina: Oh?

Armament: You can call me whatever you like. A vigilante, a villain, a criminal, I don't care. But I work for the betterment of people, or citizens, shall we say, to be more inclusive. I don't like filth. And I already know you're dealing with the filth you'll be reading about tomorrow, so I know you can see the benefit in us forming a...partnership, shall we say, to clean up the filth.

Lamina: Ah, like janitors! I think I know the filth you're referring to.

Armament: Whether you accept or not doesn't matter. I'll still be sending you materials I come across anyway. But, well, olive branches.

Lamina: This will turn into quite the dangerous game, Armament.

Armament: So does everything.

Walking home with Toshinori seemed just like common sense now that the man was living in his apartment building. He'd moved in after the adoption had gone through (which hadn't taken long, because, well, what court would question All Might himself?), now living (literally) across the hall from the Shimura apartment. The small part inside Izuku that was still a bit of a fanboy had screeched in excitement when he found out.

When he got to the school gates, waving goodbye to Shouto, who took off for his brother waiting for him, he spotted All Might- no, his...*dad*, waiting just inside the security perimeter with his briefcase in hand and couldn't help but grin. He started to jog, and as if he had a sixth sense, Toshinori turned around and smiled at him.

"Izuku," he greeted, reaching out a hand to ruffle his hair when he was within distance. "Are you ready to go home?"

"Y-yeah," Izuku said, voice only breaking a little bit, enough for him to hide with a smile. He'd never gotten to do this. Walk home with a father, have his father waiting for him, not like most of the other children in school had done...

Toshinori reached out and took his hand. That was new, too. He'd never gotten to hold his father's hand.

And Toshinori's grip was stronger, now, and he didn't wheeze or cough. He hadn't taken his handkerchief out once that day. Izuku wished...he *wished* that he would let him heal the rest, while he still could, so he could feel no pain, so he could eat his favorite foods again, so he could live as happily as he could. But All Might was absolute. He wasn't going to allow it, because he said it would hurt him, and it...it felt so odd.

He'd never gotten to have a father that cared about whether he was hurt or not.

They walked home, hand in hand, and he couldn't help but smile the

whole way, even if he kept on wishing.

Chapter End Notes

> we've veered away from the school for a while but next chapter will be a little more yuuei (and izuku) centric again i think, and boy just wait until izuku checks his chat logs. "principal nedzu i know you said i need a project for finals for you tutoring me so can it be destroying the entire hero commission?" LMAO

confide in my lions (but they keep biting me)

Armament: Did you get that file I sent over?

Arraignment: Yes.

Armament: Just checking.

[Armament] to [Ambition]: [image] He got it. boy is he pissed

[Ambition] to [Armament]: how the fuck can you tell from 'yes'?

[Armament] to [Ambition]: trust me fluffy, he's pissed. he's on THAT account.

Izuku got to school about an hour early.

It had been about two in the morning when his phone chimed and told him he had a new message from Hana. It was a very big file, one she'd apparently spent a long time scanning in to send. After viewing it, he could see why.

He didn't know if he'd ever felt so angry before.

Sure, he'd felt indignant. Angry at how people treated him sometimes. Cold and hard when he saw bullies doing their dirty work, followed by a protective need to stop them for the sake of their victims. But he'd never felt a *rage* like this before. It was a kind of anger that made his hands shake, quivering from pent-up energy and the drive to *do* something.

It was disgusting. Revolting. He'd gotten the abridged version from Hawks himself, but there had been so much he left out. He'd known the Commission had dirty people in charge of it, but he wasn't aware of just how low they'd gone. It was pure *evil.* And evil like that...it deserved to be purged.

Nedzu was, as usual, in his office when he arrived for his tutoring session. Today, though, he had something other than talking about analysis or strategy or calculations to ask about.

"Principal, I have a question about my final project."

"Oh?" Nedzu looked up at him, a half-smile on his face from his desk. He had a cup of tea in hand that was still letting off steam. "You have an idea for it?"

"In a way." The animal studied him, from his cool demeanor to the blankness of his face. "I know Yuuei-" *You.* "-Has been having some difficulties with the Commission, lately, after you hired Hawks. Last night I found out some...*things* that make me want to help." *I know what they did.* "I thought my project might relate to your efforts." *I'll help you.*

Nedzu tilted his head, his smile taking on a gleam.

"Oh? You found out?"

Where from?

"A friend of mine."

How far have you evolved?

"I think that's an excellent idea, Shimura-kun," Nedzu told him, the gleam in his eyes shining deep with a sadistic, cruel sort of glee, and the other part of him surveying Izuku with a great amount of interest and something like a mixture of excitement and pride.

I'm a player on the board.

"Why don't we talk some more about it? I think this can easily stretch into an end of year project, as well!"

I just won't tell which one.

People tended to overlook Hitoshi.

Izuku said it was because he had the same aura as his father, who people tended not to notice until they were tripping over the man in his sleeping bag in the hallway. Hitoshi was the one with what was basically trauma-induced narcolepsy, but man, he was starting to worry about Aizawa's sleep schedule, because he had stayed out until four in the morning at a rage room and had apparently smashed everything so completely to bits it had scared the shit out of the employees. Hitoshi knew it was connected to whatever was going on with Keigo, but he didn't know the specifics...at least, not yet.

And today, as usual, people were overlooking him. He didn't garner

much notice as he walked down the hall, one hand on the strap of his backpack as he stared dead ahead with bags under his eyes. But sometimes it was convenient, because it meant he heard a lot that would normally go unnoticed.

"He looked so angry," a girl from the business course whispered, sounding worried. "Do you think something's wrong?"

"I dunno," a friend of hers whispered back. "Do you think someone tried to bully someone again? There hasn't been a bully here for weeks..."

They were, of course, talking about Izuku, who'd looked like he'd wanted to strangle something when he arrived at school, which Hitoshi had avoided. Best to let him go blow off some steam somewhere. Maybe he was turning into his dad.

"I can't believe he's All Might's son!" someone else muttered, talking rapidly to another person from General Studies. "Man, he deserves it, though. He really helped me out once."

"Me too. I heard he was angry about something this morning, though. I'll totally help him if something's wrong, though- I owe him a favor."

"Me too."

Up ahead, Hitoshi spotted a head of red and white hair. He slithered in between people in the hall until he'd come to a stop beside Shouto, who was staring off into space with his usual empty gaze as he headed towards 1A's classroom. "Morning, iceberg. What's in that noggin today?"

Shouto paused and blinked as he swiveled his head around to look at him. "My 'noggin'?" he asked, sounding vaguely confused. "My brain is in my head. What else would be there?"

Hitoshi snorted. Someone else in the hallway yelled loudly as they chipperly greeted a friend. A lot of Yuuei students were loud, but he preferred quietness. That was something he had in common with Shouto, who automatically moved with him closer to the wall and further away from the noise. "You look like you're thinking."

"Oh." Shouto glanced down at the floor, then shrugged. "I was thinking about my counseling yesterday. My therapist says I'm...'touch-starved?'"

"Yeah, who isn't?"

"She says she thinks it would be beneficial if I took more opportunities to initiate physical contact with other people."

Hitoshi sighed. "Yeah, I get the same spiel." He was pretty sure half their class had been assigned to one of the counselors in the office by now. Bakugou was apparently going, he, Izuku and Shouto were, and he knew Koji and Tsuyu had agreed to go together to deal with some issues of theirs from being bullied in years past. Denki also went for help with his reading skills, and he was pretty sure Kirishima was going for *something*, though he seemed dodgy about it. "I'd offer to hug you but I think it'd be weird to just be standing here in the hallway hugging each other."

Shouto looked up and stared at him. "Yeah, I think so," he said after about a solid minute, as if he'd actually thought it through like an entire scenario. "Maybe I'll ask Ochako..."

"Good idea, buddy." Hitoshi raised a hand and clapped him on the shoulder, a bit exaggerated, and Shouto gave him a confused look. "See? Awkward."

"That was awkward. But thank you for saying I have a good idea."

"Oh man, you're at the basic social norms part. You should tip your therapist."

Shouto did, in fact, ask Ochako to hug him when he got to homeroom.

It was still about twenty minutes until homeroom class officially started. A few of the 'Bakusquad,' as they called it, were already in the room, building a pillow fort, and Ochako was humming to herself as she fluffed out a large blanket to lay over the floor on the other end of the room. She was still humming as Shouto walked up to her, wanting to test his theory, and she gave him a bright smile. "Good morning, Shouto! What's up?"

"Nothing much," Shouto replied, because he'd already learned what that piece of slang meant and that 'the ceiling?' wasn't a valid answer. She stood up and dusted off her hands, even though he was pretty sure the floor was so clean they could probably eat off of it. "I had a question."

"Well, shoot!"

"I was wondering if..." He trailed off, feeling nervous for some reason, and had to keep himself from looking away from her. "You could...give me a hug?"

She arched an eyebrow in surprise, smile falling for a moment, but didn't look offended. "Sure," she said, another smile appearing on her face as she reached out her arms. Shouto tensed, but stood there as she wrapped them around his shoulders, laying her cheek on his shoulder. "One hug coming up!"

It felt...nice. People didn't hug him a lot. Izuku did, though, and after hugging him so often to try and help him heal, because Shouto didn't like seeing him in pain, he wanted to see if other people hugging him made him feel the same way.

In one facet, it did. Ochako was his friend. She cared about him, and had made him a charm bracelet matching hers and Izuku's and had taken the time to pick out each charm individually to be something she thought he'd like. He felt...safe, and cared for. Even if he had to remind himself to hug her back, because he still wasn't quite used to it, it felt good.

On the other hand, it still didn't feel quite the same as when Izuku touched him.

Ochako stepped away from him and cast him another smile. "You can have a hug anytime you want, Shouto!"

"Thank you," Shouto replied, half out of habit, lowering his eyes. "I wanted to...test a few things. My therapist said she thinks I should engage in more physical contact with people...like hugging your friends. Izuku was the first person I hugged in a long time, but it felt different for some reason."

"Oh?" Her eyes took on a strange light, eyebrows raising. "What do you mean?"

"Well..." Now that he actually had to try and explain it, it felt a bit embarrassing. Shouto wasn't *so* unaware he had no idea what things like crushes were. He'd just always thought he would spend all of his adolescence hating his father, training, and generally scorning things everyone else was doing most of the time. He was supposed to be different, after all, someone whose only purpose was to surpass All Might. So he didn't quite understand what it meant, but wasn't that what a crush was? Liking one person more than everyone else? "It felt good in a different way? I'm not sure."

"Do you think you have a crush on him?"

Her face was alight in excitement. Shouto frowned and rubbed at his head, glancing at the wall. "Maybe?" he offered, unsure of himself even if she seemed to be bouncing on her heels in excitement. "What does it mean to have a crush?" Ochako seemed like she would know. She knew lots of things about social matters.

She came back down on her heels and hummed. "Well, a crush is when you have a person you really, really like. Like, in a way different way than all your other friends. They're super special, and you like spending time with them, and you want to do stuff like hold hands and hug them, or maybe even kiss them." The idea of kissing anyone felt absolutely foreign. He couldn't envision himself putting his lips on anything, let alone another person.

"How do I know if I have a crush?"

She giggled. "You just kind of *know*," she said, eyes becoming a bit dreamy as she looked up at the ceiling and folded her thumbs together. "They feel different than other people. They make you feel good and safe. I think you should ask Izuku out on a date!"

"A date?"

"You know, a romantic date! Like going to the movies or out for ice cream or to take a walk in the park."

"But Izuku and I already do things together," Shouto replied, confused. "Won't he just think we're doing something normal?"

"Well, you could *tell* him you mean it as a date," Ochako explained with an abundance of patience.

He frowned. "I don't know."

"Well, why don't you ask some other people for advice? Your big sister has a girlfriend, right? She should know about romance, then!"

That was true. Like a lightbulb had gone on over his head, he nodded vigorously in response and sat his backpack down to help her prepare their daily pillow pile. "That's a good idea. I'll ask my siblings for advice when I go home later." They were having a game night, so it was a perfect opportunity. They'd all be in the same place. "But doesn't that mean you should ask Tsuyu on a date?"

Ochako let out a loud, forced laugh as she threw a pillow at his head with enough force to nearly knock him over. "It's time to build a fort! Here, you get those pillows over there!"

Class was going as usual that day. Shouto seemed distracted by something, as he kept staring off into space, but he did that a lot, and Izuku also seemed distracted, muttering to himself as he wrote in a notebook, but he also did that a lot. Otherwise, things had gone back to their usual 'normal.' Even Aizawa-sensei seemed a little calmer than his usual state of 'the most lowkey teacher alive until someone on a hiking trail on a field trip had called Mina weird-looking once and he'd made them all wait with Hawks at a rest stop while he verbally tore into them down the trail.' So, as far as all logic went, Momo should have been in a good mood.

But she couldn't deny she'd been in a bit of a funk lately. She couldn't help it, really. She was at peace with the ordeal with her uncle, as far as her thoughts about it, but it still made her feel...well, she didn't think she was depressed, but she certainly felt gloomy at times.

It was a free period now. She was roaming the hallway, after going to get a snack from the cafeteria, and not paying enough attention, because she almost ran into Midnight as she came around a corner. "Ahp!" she muttered around the straw to her juice packet in her mouth, too startled to be embarrassed by the awkward noise she'd just made.

When she realized who was standing there, she quickly tried to apologize. "Oh, I'm so sorry ma'am!"

It came out weird because of the straw still in her mouth. Flushing, she held her juice lower and gave her teacher an apologetic bow.

Midnight laughed like she'd said something funny. "It's all right, Momo," she said, giving her a pat to the head like she always had during their internship when Momo successfully took down a criminal. Momo had a fun time running around with the Midnight Boys, since none of them hit on her or made comments about her costume or assumed she was weak because she was a girl, and they all protected her when she made small mistakes here and there and just gave her advice for how to do better rather than berate her for it. "How are you doing?"

"I am fine, sensei. How are you?"

Midnight tilted her head, her expression mildly searching. "I'm fine, but that's not what I meant," she elaborated with a friendly smile, setting her hand on Momo's shoulder. "I mean how are *you* doing? Since everything that happened with your uncle."

"Oh." Her mind went blank again, like it usually did when she thought about it. "I am fine, sensei."

Midnight's eyes softened. Momo didn't know why she was giving her such a look. "Are you sure, sweetheart?" Momo nodded. "I know Aizawa talked to you about it, and recommended you go to counseling for a little bit, but he said you hadn't."

A crease formed in her brow. "Did he ask you to speak to me...?"

"No, not really, but you know him, he worries about all of you. And I think you would really benefit from just a few sessions. You don't have to go, of course, but I care about you, dear, and I think you're not as fine as you say."

Momo gave her teacher a befuddled look. Midnight bent down, slightly, so they could see more eye-to-eye, her expression so...normal. She didn't look pitying or pushy. She looked just as her usual cheerful self. "It's all right to be upset about what happened," she said, voice soft and easy. "You did very well, protecting Izuku like that, and you acted like a real hero. But it's also fine to feel *not* fine about everything that went down. You may not have been very close to him, but Eiichii was still your uncle- still a member of your family. It's all right to feel betrayed, to feel sad. I've noticed you seem a bit down."

Momo looked away from her teacher's face. Confronted so directly, she knew the woman was right, at least to an extent. She did feel bad. She felt bad that a member of her own family had turned out so horrible. She felt bad that her parents had been surprised, but then just sighed and said it was a shame and that Eiichii had given up great opportunities. It wasn't as though she herself had been in tears over the entire thing, but...sometimes she wished her family was more emotive. More like other families. More...open, familiar. Her own classmates had taken more time to comfort her even when she hadn't seemed upset.

"I suppose that I have been," she whispered. "But it's fine. I can deal with anything. I don't want to lose any time I could use for schoolwork, or training, or other important things..."

"Taking care of yourself is important, too. Your own health will

impact your performance as a hero, remember? It isn't a waste of time to talk to someone. You know, if you'd like, I could ask Hound Dog for you. Be your go-between, you know? In case you're nervous about setting up an appointment."

Momo bit into her lip. She felt...indecisive. "Well...I don't want to waste his time."

"It's his job, hon. Trust me, you aren't wasting anyone's time. How about tomorrow after our review in art history? I know you have a free period then. Would you be comfortable with that?"

"I...I think I would, sensei. If it's...not trouble. Thank you."

"It's no trouble at all," Midnight said, reaching down to give her a brief hug, her voice still as easygoing as though they were talking about the weather. And somehow, something in Momo felt relieved.

Midnight was certainly an eccentric character. She waved her whip around enthusiastically in training exercises she oversaw, yelled for joy when they got right answers in history, joked around with them all the time. And at first glance, she didn't exactly *look* motherly, but something about her was...comforting. Calming. It wasn't like Momo's own mother had mistreated her- spoken badly to her or hurt her- but she was always so busy with work, through Momo's entire life; she left her with nannies and tutors growing up and acknowledged her achievements with smiles that were often accompanied by distracted eyes.

In a way, Momo wished her own mother was a bit more like Midnight.

She let herself hug the woman back for a moment. It felt nice. (Oddly, Shouto asked her when she returned to the classroom to hug him, and looked very confused when she pulled away. 'You're very good at hugging,' he said after, to which she thanked him with a perplexed furrow in her brow.)

Izuku was walking along, bothering no one, muttering to himself as he wrote down ideas (in code, obviously, that Nedzu still hadn't managed to crack), when hands emerged from the floor and lifted him into the air as Mirio followed after from beneath him- thankfully in the uniform he'd had made with his DNA- with a cheerful cry of "What's up, little buddy!"

"Mirio-senpai! I'm writing!"

"And now you're floating!" Mirio yelled back cheerfully, laughing as he began trotting down the hallway holding Izuku over his head. "Just like your Quirk! Get it?"

Izuku wriggled until he could tilt his head back and gave the older boy an unimpressed look, even if the effect was dulled since he was effectively upside-down. "Senpai, please put me down."

"But it's like a roller coaster ride!"

Izuku decided to escape his grasp by floating further away towards the ceiling. Mirio stopped, visibly pouting up at him, and planted his hands on his hips. "You come down right now, mister."

"Maybe I don't want to," Izuku shot back, his feet touching the ceiling tiles.

"I'm afraid I'm a hall monitor today! I may have to write you up!"

"When you literally just used your Quirk in school?"

Mirio broke and grinned, scratching his cheek as Izuku floated down to stand beside him. "Did you need something, senpai?" he asked, because he still hadn't quite learned that sometimes "I want to be a menace" was within Mirio's definition of 'needing something.' "Shouldn't you be...you know...monitoring the halls?"

Mirio's smile became more sheepish as another third-year turned the corner from behind him. It was an anxious-looking boy with blue hair, hands shoved into his pockets, who wore a hall monitor armband as well. "Yes, he should be," he mumbled. "Mirio, quit bothering people..."

"Oh yeah, I don't think you two have actually ever met!" Mirio said excitedly, instead of acknowledging his shirking of duty. "This is that little squirt I told you about!"

"All Might's son?"

"Yep! Shimura Izuku! Izuku, this is my boyfriend, Amajiki Tamaki. He's really shy, but I'm sure he'll like you."

"Shut up, Mirio," Tamaki muttered, red in the face and still refusing to look anywhere near Izuku's. "Quit telling people I'm shy. Besides, weren't you supposed to be finding Nejire-"

"FOUND ME!" a third voice screamed out as a girl with a lighter shade of blue hair came busting around the opposite corner, smoke sliding from her heel as she skidded. "Tag! I found them first!"

Another girl came behind her. "I'm Hadou Nejire," the first one explained before Izuku even had time to think, leaping forward to lean down closer to his face. "That's my girlfriend Yuyu! I've heard you're the excitable first year with a Quirk like mine! I can convert my own stamina into energy to use, you see, and I can fly and do a bunch of cool stuff with it! I saw you at the Sports Festival, yours is sooooo cool- you seem to be a little more diverse with your energy source than I am, and those whips are so awesome! Say, does your hair naturally grow like that? It reminds me of broccoli!"

"Nejire," the other girl chastised, grabbing her elbow and pulling her back. Izuku looked mildly windblown, rapidly blinking to try and process her questions in time with her. "Don't scare the poor kid."

"Aw, did I startle you? Sorry, I-!"

"We should all," Tamaki complained, lightly kicking the wall he'd gravitated to, "be monitoring. The *halls*."

"Technically we're monitoring this hall right this minute," Nejire told him, making him groan. Then she turned back to Izuku, eyes suddenly going round and sympathetic. "I heard about what happened with your dad, I'm soooo sorry little guy that must have been so horrible-"

"H-how do you know about *that*?" Izuku squeaked, startled. He turned to look at the most likely culprit, making Mirio smile sheepishly and twiddle his fingers together as he averted his gaze to the windows.

"Ah...us third-years have a way of hearing about things, you see..." His smile slowly faded, though, as a frown formed on his face. "I wish I'd known about it when it was happening..."

"You wouldn't have been able to do anything, though."

"Well, it can be frustrating," Nejire said, at a lower volume, doodling a random pattern into her palm with her index finger. "Being in year three, let alone the Big Three. We're considered more skilled than a lot of real Pro Heroes, but we're still students, so we want to help out with everything, even though we can't always do that...but what's great is you're a-ok! And you've got All Might for a dad now, whoo! What's that like? It must be so amazing! Does he cook? Does he tell bedtime stories? What's he like? Is it fun having class with your own

dad? H-"

Yuyu put a hand over her mouth before her ranting could continue.

"Sorry for blabbing," Mirio continued, giving him another smile that didn't quite reach his eyes. "It kind of slipped out the other day when we were walking home together. But you're really all right, aren't you?" His eyes seemed searching, somehow. It reminded him somehow a little bit of Toshinori. Izuku supposed they both could look cheerful even if they didn't feel it.

He realized, with a little bit of embarrassment, that that was the point of Mirio popping up in the first place- to see if he was all right. A slight flush came to his cheeks, but he tried to ignore it. "I'm fine, really! It wasn't as dramatic as it seemed..."

"Villains trying to *assassinate* you wasn't as dramatic as it seemed?" Tamaki muttered disbelievingly into the wall.

"Well, you sure seem like a trouble magnet," Nejire pointed out mercilessly. "Maybe that's why Eraserhead looks like he wants to kill someone constantly!"

Izuku's eyebrow twitched. His teacher was stressed, he knew that- but it sure was becoming a running theme in the school that at any given moment he looked like he was planning a crime. He wondered if their class was maybe *too* stressful for him...were they too much trouble? He was such a good teacher that he cared about every little thing, and they did seem to be trouble magnets...

"He did get an assistant teacher, though," Yuyu cut in. "With your class, I'm not surprised. I've been wanting to meet him- it's the number three, Hawks, right?"

"Wow, being taught by All Might *and* Hawks? You guys are so lucky!"

Mirio turned away from the girls and towards his partner, spreading his hands. "Hey, Tamaki! If you eat part of a bird, you could grow wings too! Bird solidarity!"

Tamaki just groaned into the wall.

Izuku bit his lip to contain a smile. It felt a little awkward standing there with them all, being their junior, but with how at ease they were with one another, and how they bickered, it was sort of fun.

"-And he's only a few years older than us! Isn't that so cool?"

-But the conversation did remind him of his notes, and he looked down at his book with an idea for entrapping that handler Sotaru, his dark aura going unnoticed by the oblivious third-years.

Natsuo hadn't yet arrived when Shouto got home. Fuyumi's car was in the driveway, though, so he knew she was undoubtedly inside cooking something to go along with their game night. Sure enough, when he stepped inside and took off his shoes he could smell something good floating out of the kitchen.

"Fuyumi, Touya," he called out, eager to get more advice (after asking a grand total of twelve people at school), "I have a question."

He walked past the living room and stopped at the bar, setting his backpack into a chair and standing expectantly. Fuyumi returned his stare from the stove, where she was still holding a spatula midair, and Touya just raised an eyebrow at him from where he leaned on the counter nearby. Maybe they'd been talking about something, he wasn't sure.

"What is it, Shouto?" his sister finally asked, when it became clear he was waiting for them to respond in some fashion.

Shouto folded his hands together on the counter. "I want to know how you know if you have a crush."

His sister coughed on something almost immediately after he said it and turned away brusquely, covering her mouth with her wrist. His brother squinted at him like he hadn't heard him right.

"And, furthermore, what to do if you do have a crush," he added on, just in case they forgot to talk about that part.

Wheezing a bit, Fuyumi turned back to him and cleared her throat. "W-well, I wasn't expecting...*this* talk tonight," she said, setting her spatula down. "Do you...think you might have a crush, Shouto?"

"I think so. Ochako said I should ask for your opinion, since you have a girlfriend and thus know about romance."

"Well, you certainly don't do what Touya does and tease them for weeks without saying anything," Fuyumi muttered, garnering a dirty look from her older brother.

Shouto frowned. "Why would you do that?" he asked Touya, who just threw his head back and pinched his nose.

"Gee, who knows, why do I do anything? I'm just a mystery."

"Well, Shouto, having a crush is a special experience," Fuyumi plowed forward, ignoring him. "Does your heart beat faster around them? Do you look forward to seeing them every day? Do you want to do well when you know they're watching?"

Shouto thought for a moment. He supposed his heart did pick up when Izuku held him, sometimes. And he always wanted to do well if Izuku could see, but he assumed every person in their class did. "Yes."

"Well, if you think you like this person, it doesn't hurt to try and explore it. You could ask them on a date. What are they like?"

"Yeah, bro, tell us all about your first crush," Touya drawled, lifting himself to sit on the counter. "Spare no detail."

His sarcasm flew over Shouto's head. "It's Izuku," he replied bluntly, making Fuyumi almost drop her spatula again out of sheer surprise. Touya blinked at the ceiling, not knowing why he was even surprised. He should know better by now than to expect Shouto of all people to have a filter. "He is intelligent, nice to everyone he meets, and very strong and selfless. It also feels nice when he hugs me."

His siblings sat there in silence for a minute.

"Goddammit," Touya finally muttered under a sigh, for some reason, pinching his nose again. "Had to be that one? The trouble magnet?"

"Huh?"

"Nothing."

"Why don't you ask him out to lunch?" Fuyumi cut in sweetly, kicking Touya in the shin. "I'll make sure you have some money to treat him. There's that soba place you like, you could take him there."

"Did you start dating Rumi by going out for lunch?"

Fuyumi froze for some reason, going pink in the face, and Touya turned to her with the biggest smirk in existence. He opened his mouth but didn't get to say anything before she'd kicked him in the shin again. "Yep!" she forced out. "Definitely! We did lunch!" It wasn't

like she'd simmered on her crush for a week before ending up in Rumi's apartment and ultimately leaping into bed with her after they both sat through an awkwardly long movie ignoring the couch space in between them and then making out in said space, and she wouldn't stand for any such slander from her brother. "Lunch was great!"

"Okay," Shouto replied, a bit hesitantly, because his siblings were still giving each other weird looks. He decided to ignore it. "I'll try that."

"Let us know how it goes! I'm sure he'll say yes, he seems like such a sweet boy-"

"Sweet my ass-"

"Touya shut up-"

The front door slammed open. Fuyumi and Touya ceased their bickering when Natsuo came sliding in, literally, his shoes squeaking crankily on the wooden floor and making Fuyumi wince.

"*Guys*," he wheezed out, with such urgency Shouto stood up from the chair he'd slid into at some point, thinking something was wrong. "You're never gonna believe- you know how Mom's doctors were having us wait to come in to make sure she was stable?" They all perked up at the mention of their mother, and Shouto heard his brother's boots hit the tile as he slid off the counter. "Before telling her about- I mean, you know- well- I got a call from the nurse- she got fucking released!"

"What?" Fuyumi squawked, aghast. It was certainly amazing news, but she couldn't fathom how it had happened- just a week before, she was under the impression her mother's doctors were slowly working up to giving her mother the news that her oldest son wasn't dead, so as not to damage her already fragile psyche, and let them visit, and now she was released completely?

"Nurse called me from a stairwell," Natsuo panted, placing a hand on his chest- he must have run all the way there- "Wasn't supposed to, I guess, but- something happened, she heard about it somehow, started demanding they let her out, there were lawyers there? I have no fucking idea what went on, but apparently Yuuei was involved somehow? I don't know, I don't *know*- but what does it matter! She got out today! She's on the train-"

"She's coming here?" Shouto asked, startled, his brain picking through the haze of information for the most important bit. He hadn't been

able to visit his mother in...well, he'd barely gotten to visit her before the ordeal with his father went down and he'd had to stop.

"Yeah-"

He didn't need to hear anymore. He knew the route from the train stop closest to the house, so he knew he could meet her there- or halfway, at least, it was such a direct route- he turned and sprinted for the door, not even bothering with his shoes.

"Shouto!" Fuyumi yelled after him, halfway to breathless even without moving. "Shou-"

"Fuck it, let's just all go!" Natsuo insisted, turning and running out after his brother. A mild complaint floated off after him. "*More fucking running!"*

As such, Dabi ended up barely getting his house locked before he was running after his idiot siblings, who didn't bother with the *car* sitting in their driveway, and he cursed them all a little for their unburned legs as his staples complained at him.

it roars

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"I want to see my son."

It was the only thing Todoroki Rei had said for three days, after her doctor refused to allow her a visit out of the hospital, with tears in her eyes as she stubbornly refused to engage in any of her sessions with anything beyond *I want to see my son.* None of them knew who had told her, not even her. A letter had arrived in the mail, bearing no return address, and a nurse had given it to her, thinking it was from her daughter or sons, not knowing what it held- a summary of a custody case she couldn't believe, and pictures to prove it.

"I want to see my son."

After all this time, he was alive. Her first baby boy. The first bit of happiness that had come out of her marriage with Enji. The poor boy she hadn't been able to protect, who had suffered while she was forced to watch from the sidelines as his psyche was broken, as his hair began to turn white like her own from the sheer stress of it all, as he gravitated between crying into Natsu's shirt and glaring at everyone in the world like he hated it all.

She hadn't left her bed for thirteen days when she'd heard the news. Enji hadn't even come to see her and tell her in person. She hadn't been able to attend the funeral. She hadn't even been able to see his body and send him to rest with a bouquet of their favorite blue flowers like she'd wanted.

But he was *alive*, *alive*, and Rei was going to see him no matter what.

"I want to see my son."

Every day, her doctors told her no. Every day, Rei, for the first time, began to grow angry. Angry that they had kept her here- that they *were* keeping her here. Her son was *alive* and she needed to *see him!*

Then, one day, an unfamiliar face appeared to visit her.

"Good day, ma'am," said the woman who'd barged her way into the

hospital with a business card and court order. "Matsuno Yuno. I'm a lawyer that works with your son's school. They've taken...an *interest* in your commitment, and I'd like to represent you from here on out. We're very interested in uniting you with your children again."

Rei looked the woman in the eye and folded her hands to get ahold of the ice that was, for the first time in over ten years, beginning to creep up her palms.

"Thank you, Matsuno-san. I would very much like that."

She was going to see her son.

The sound of rushing wind in Shouto's ears came to a screeching halt about the time he tripped and went sailing down the last few steps in the station onto the incoming train platform, making several people waiting on said train around him give him confused glances.

He winced as he sat up. He'd taken harder blows in training, but it still smarted. Barely after he'd had time to take a breath, he saw a red and white streak come down the steps as his sister sprinted after him. "Fuyumi?"

The woman came to a harsh stop just past him, doubling back to stand closer and pant as she placed her hands on her knees. "I did track in high school," she explained, wiping a bead of sweat from her forehead with a half-smile. "Natsu got the strength, but I got the speed."

It occurred to Shouto, then, that she was joking with him (though he was pretty sure she'd actually done track when she was in high school), and he returned the smile as he got to his feet. They were burning, and it made him remember he'd forgotten his shoes. However, right now he didn't care- all he cared about was the fact that his mother was on the train he could hear coming into the station.

Fuyumi's head snapped up at the sound, too. She pulled him up by the arm, and he burst into a run again to get closer to where the doors opened up. She caught up to him as the train started to slow down, still breathing heavily, and waited by his shoulder.

A voice over the speakers came alive and announced the stop as the train stilled and opened its doors. He watched people stream out, one after the other, businessmen and students and normal everyday people, watching for stark white hair.

The stop was flooded with passengers now. With a bit of disappointment, he watched the last person step off through the door he'd been watching, and looked around frantically for his mother anywhere else.

"Not that one, not that one," he heard his sister muttering, her hands twisting and pulling at her sweater. "Not there..."

The train doors closed. It began pulling away, while the people who'd gotten off began leaving and climbing the stairs behind them. Shouto frowned.

It was when they finally cleared out he saw her.

She was standing still outside one of the door stops, a small, almost tiny suitcase in one hand, more of a bag, really, staring up at the screen that showed the station's information with an almost wondrous expression. Shouto remembered, then, that his mother had been confined for almost eleven years now. She hadn't traveled, done something as regular and simple as take the train for over ten years- he wished he'd been able to come with her from the hospital. He didn't want her to have to do anything alone.

"Mom!"

A cry ripped itself from Fuyumi's lips right as he leapt into a sprint again. Rei turned, her expression going slack in surprise, and she saw him, and the only thing he heard was her suitcase clatter to the floor before she opened her arms and drew him in.

His mother was here.

She was right here, and it felt just as good seeing her as it had the first time he'd visited the hospital, after the Sports Festival and Izuku knocking sense into him.

"I'm right here, baby," she told him in a wavering voice, obviously starting to cry. "I-I'm here, and I won't leave, I promise."

"Mom," Shouto whispered, almost reverently. She was here now, and so was Touya, and so was Fuyumi and Natsuo- they were all there, free of his father, and they could finally be...*together.* Like a family, like...something he didn't even know how to describe.

Rei lifted one arm from him. It was to welcome Fuyumi, who knocked into them ungracefully struggling to see with how many tears were

clogging her eyes.

"Fuyumi," Rei uttered, and though he couldn't see her face, with his own buried in her shirt, she sounded pained. "My little girl."

Fuyumi let out a sniffle, but didn't say anything.

Shouto wondered how hard it must have been, being the only girl in a home with a half-insane father and brothers who didn't even know how to take care of themselves.

"-Guuuuuuuuys!" The audible peel of Natsuo's sneakers squeaking on the station floor made Shouto wince as his brother came in hot pursuit of them, a pant in his voice. "Is sh- Mom!"

Even though he didn't want to, Shouto let go of his mother to let his siblings hug her instead. Natsuo sprinted over and wrapped his arms around both his mother and his sister, tears streaming freely down his face. It was...odd, seeing them all together after what felt like so long, and...

Touya-

Shouto turned and looked around for his eldest brother, feeling almost a bit frantic. That was right, Touya was here, and his mother needed to see him, needed to see he was all right-

He looked up when he heard panting. "Jesus fuck," Touya muttered as he appeared at the turn at the top of the stairs, wiping his forehead as he grabbed onto the railing and started jogging down. "We have a *perfectly good* car in the drive, and those idiots choose to fuckin' sprint out of the house instead-"

There he is!

Without giving it another thought, Shouto turned, grasped his mother's hand, and jogged towards the stairs, pulling her with him. "Shouto?" he heard her ask, vaguely confused, but he was only focused on his brother, and when they reached the point they could see each other- he knew they both knew. Touya froze, halfway down the stairs, and he felt his mother go still.

"T..." Rei sounded breathless, shaky almost, her hand going limp in Shouto's until he let it go and awkwardly veered back. "T-Touya?"

A variety of expressions flashed across Touya's face. There was

something pained in his eyes, Shouto could see it, as he leaned forward and set down the foot he'd raised. Slowly, he came down the rest of the stairs, then stopped on the bottom level. He stared at Rei, looking torn, and finally settled on something to say, voice coming out raspy. "...Hey, Mom."

Shouto realized that, even though there were tears in Rei's eyes, she hadn't been letting them fall, but she did then, openly sobbing as she rushed forward and threw her arms around her oldest child. Touya closed his eyes, some kind of grief that Shouto couldn't understand falling over his face, before he dragged his arms up to return her embrace. Rei cried into his shoulder, louder than Shouto had ever heard her cry.

It felt like a long while before Rei lifted her face. Touya raked in a breath, seeming nervous, seeming to steel himself as she lifted shaking hands to his face.

"Are-" Rei cut herself off, choked up, and brushed her thumbs over his cheeks, feeling the staples beneath. "A-are you...hiding how you look, baby? Y- you don't have to, I promise. I love you. I love you...so much."

Touya, Shouto realized, was resolutely trying not to cry.

"It's fine, Ma," he mumbled, one hand gently brushing over the back of Rei's. But the urging look on her face must have shaken his resolve, because he visibly hesitated before reaching for the ring he always wore.

It must have been some kind of Quirk, Shouto realized, because when he took it off the scars were back and his hair was white.

"You see?" Natsuo whispered, nearly hissing. *"I told you it was hi-"*

"Shut up!" Fuyumi actually hissed back at him, kicking him in the shin as they stood a few yards away watching.

One of Rei's hands drifted to card itself through his hair. *Right,* Dabi thought, seeing white in the corner of his eye. *I forgot to dye it last night.*

Abruptly, his mother looked away from him, turning her face towards the ground as she recoiled. Her hands retreated to her chest, curling around a small little locket Dabi was sure he recognized from somewhere. Had she had that when he was a kid?

"...I...I'm so sorry, Touya. I'm..." Rei paused, a sob hanging in her tone, and Fuyumi stared at her in clear concern from behind her. "I-I was supposed to p- protect you, but I couldn't. I-I'm your *mother*, but I still couldn't...it's all...it's all my fault. I'm- I'm so-"

"Mom," Dabi croaked out, reaching forward but not able to will himself to touch her. He'd thought about it so much, over the years, finally seeing his mother again, but he hadn't thought it was ever going to happen. And sure, he'd been planning on trying to get his mother out of that damned hospital, but it was so, so different actually seeing her. "This isn't- this isn't your fucki- your fault. Stop- stop saying that."

"This is *his* fault, not yours," Natsuo cut in, hands clenched into fists while his sister looked heartbroken beside him. "There was nothing you could have done!"

"Mother, please don't blame yourself...we...we're finally all together again now, isn't that what matters...?"

Natsuo looked down at Fuyumi and picked up on the urgent look she sent his way. That was right, he thought. They couldn't just assuage their mother's guilt in one conversation, but focusing on the positives...that might help. "'Yumi's right. We can- we can be together now! Just like when we used to have dinner as kids, when he was out of the house. Remember that?"

Rei was still sniffling behind a sleeve. Leaning down, Touya finally let himself put his hands on her shoulders and murmured into her ear. "C'mon, Mom."

"I...I suppose you're right," she whispered, moving to grasp one of Touya's hands again, anything to come into contact with any part of him. She looked up, with just a hint of a smile. "Whenever work kept...*him* late, it was one of the only times I could have you all together...those are- good memories."

Wait.

What?

Shouto frowned.

"What do you mean?" he asked, unaware of how much he would regret bringing up his lack of understanding. Four sets of eyes flicked over to him, and he found himself growing inexplicably nervous. "I

don't remember having dinner with all of you at the same time..."

He'd always eaten alone, or just with his mother, as far as he knew, because of Endeavor. At times they would eat with him and it would be a short, tense affair. But with his siblings...?

"Well, you were very young at the time," Rei said, wiping her face. "But remember when your...father was out late and we could have dinner together?"

Natsuo grinned. "We always had soba," he explained. "That's how it became your favorite! Surely you remember that, right?"

When Shouto continued to frown, the grin slowly fell from his face.

"I don't...think so?" Looking from face to face, Shouto desperately tried to think of why he wouldn't remember something so important it ingrained his favorite food into his brain. "I'm pretty sure I only met Touya once or twice..."

It was like he'd slapped them all across the face. Natsuo and Fuyumi stared at him in shock, while Rei's eyes widened and Touya developed a furrow in his brow.

"In the yard," Shouto explained further, feeling more and more uncomfortable. "When I would pass him. But I don't remember anything like tha-"

He froze.

He didn't remember what they were talking about, but he did remember why he may not.

Natsuo noticed instantly when he stopped and averted his eyes. "What?" he demanded, taking a step closer to him. "Shouto, what were you about to say?"

"I...it's nothing-"

"No, it's something. What is it?"

Shouto swallowed. He looked at his mother, who was starting to look more and more concerned, and hoped what he was about to say didn't hurt her further. "Well...I was...injured in training once," he began uncomfortably. "I...had a concussion, and I felt...odd? After, and Father's nurse said I might not remember some things, but Mother was

gone by then, so I didn't have anyone to ask...I didn't- realize I had...forgotten anything."

There was a long moment of silence.

"What the *fuck*?" Natsuo cried, sounding personally affronted. "You had an injury serious enough to cause some form of amnesia and he *didn't even take you to the hospital?"*

"I never went to the hospital," Shouto tried to defend himself, unsure of why he felt the need to, and Natsuo turned away from him, an angry scowl on his face. He looked at his mother again and felt his stomach drop. She had moved a hand to cover her mouth, and was staring down at the ground again, so her bangs shielded her face. "I- it's not that bad, I mean- I'm fine now. I couldn't have forgotten that much?"

"I know we didn't get all that much time together," Fuyumi whispered, still staring at him in shock. "But...is that why...you barely knew me and Natsu when we- we were finally allowed to see you again after you started at Yuuei?"

An awkward silence fell over them all.

"Well...that certainly explains a few things," Dabi finally muttered at length, something dark in his eyes as he slid his ring back on. No one else in the station needed to see his scars in the open, after all. Fuyumi was right- now he knew why Shouto had seemed to have so little recollection of him, to the point of not even recognizing him at all. Now he knew why Shouto was still so awkward with them all, even Fuyumi and Natsu. Now he knew.

Now he knew just yet another reason why Todoroki Enji deserved to rot in hell.

"I'm...sorry," Rei murmured. "If...if I just hadn't-"

"Let's- let's all just stop," Fuyumi interrupted, sounding sick. "Why don't...why don't we go home now, Mom? We...can have dinner together again, after all this time..."

For a moment Rei said nothing at all. Shouto watched Touya move a hand to her shoulder again, and it prompted her to look up, doing her best to smile. "You're...right. Let's- let's go and...do something together. I just want...to be with my children again."

She didn't let go of Touya's arm, or Shouto's hand, once while they walked home, at a much more sedate pace than they'd come, but the boy couldn't get rid of the sour feeling in his stomach at having caused the somber mood they were all in.

And underneath it, he, too, felt a little sick, as he wondered just how much of them he'd forgotten.

The apartment building Izuku lived in wasn't anything too fancy, but it was still quite nice, with a few perks he enjoyed growing up- namely, the alcove on the first level with a few coolers and vending machines for snacks. He went down after a few hours spent doing homework (he passed up Midnight *and* Ectoplasm on his way down- that was going to take a while to get used to) and got himself a can of soda and a candy bar. His mother usually didn't like him to have a lot of sugar in the evening, but allowed it on nights she knew he was going to be up late working. *You always need a little treat when you work hard,* she always said with a smile.

He was on his way back to his apartment, snacks in hand, when he heard voices floating down the hallway. He paused at the corner just beyond both his and All Might's apartments, not meaning to eavesdrop but feeling as though people may be having a discussion he should give them privacy for, but felt a small chill when he recognized the voices.

"Toshinori, I'm only trying to look out for you." That...that was Sir Nighteye. Izuku knew his voice from interviews, and...he was pretty sure he'd heard it before, as he had some vague recollection of it.

"Mirai, you know I appreciate the intent, but I just-"

"Toshinori. Please just listen to me when I say that this is a mistake. To entrust your Quirk to *that* boy-"

"He is the best choice!"

"It's a mistake. I don't want you to have to regret this."

"I won't."

"And if something happens- if he-"

"He won't!"

Izuku felt like a stone had settled in his stomach. Quietly, he stepped backwards until he could no longer hear them, retreating back towards the elevator to hide away on a different floor until he could be sure the other Hero was gone. He felt sick to his stomach, suddenly, the snacks in his hands no longer appealing at all.

He...he thinks I'm a bad choice.

He thinks I'll disappoint Dad...

He made himself promise to absolutely not cry, but he broke said promise when he found a window to crawl out of and sat down on a random balcony attached to an apartment with no lights on. Below, he saw a tall, towering figure exit the building and enter a still-idling car on the street, but he didn't move for a good half an hour after it pulled away from the curb.

They had soba for dinner.

Despite everything, it felt...nice. They had all relaxed a little bit more by the time they made it back to the house, and his mother had started to smile again. Fuyumi spent some time with her in her room- where she would be living- Shouto would actually get to see his mother *every day* again- and then Natsuo had insisted she rest while he and Fuyumi made dinner, so Shouto sat on the sofa with her while they waited. Normally, she would be asking him about everything he usually wrote about in his letters, but he was content to sit quietly and listen to her ask Touya questions.

He was a bit uncomfortable at certain parts- probably because he was technically a villain and had to explain *that* away- but Touya's eyes were uncharacteristically soft. Shouto, at one point, wanted to give them time alone- *he'd* wanted time alone with his mom when he first saw her in the hospital again, after all- so he wandered into the kitchen to watch Fuyumi and Natsuo whisper-bicker about how they'd guessed the blue-fire arsonist they'd seen on a little-known vigilante/ villain watch Twitter account was *definitely* Touya and how they'd been right but absolutely *couldn't* tell him.

When he glanced back he saw Touya sitting with a bowed head, his hair drooping over his eyes, and Rei leaning down to kiss his forehead. His shoulders slumped when she did.

Sometimes, Shouto's older brother seemed very *tired*.

He didn't just mean when he stayed up too late for his 'secret activities,' either. Touya...Shouto thought he was a good person, but he seemed...kind of *empty*, sometimes. Shouto sometimes caught him staring aimlessly out windows, or tracing the design in his ring over and over with a faraway look, or simply sitting with his eyes closed doing nothing. He seemed almost particularly *sad*, even though it didn't look like what most people looked like when they were sad. One night, he'd come home smelling heavy of smoke and ash and had gone quietly to his room, and Shouto was sure he'd seen that empty-looking expression in his eyes again.

He didn't know how to explain it, really, but he was pretty sure it was because of Touya's life in general being so terrible, and he didn't know how to help. He wondered if his brother was what his therapist had said he himself was, 'depressed.' If he was, he could get better, like Shouto was getting, couldn't he? But he didn't know if Touya would listen if he asked him to see a therapist. Usually, Shouto just tried to help in little ways; making sure they had Touya's favorite mochi flavor in the freezer, that he didn't get woken up when his friends came over at night either to filch food or get help giving themselves stitches, that their television blacklisted any Endeavor content (something Izuku had taught him to do).

He hoped their mother being back would help.

At dinner, though, Natsuo broke.

"So," he said, holding a bunch of noodles with his chopsticks and waiting for the steam to die down. "What do you call your edgy alter ego?"

Touya glared at him with a heat hotter than any of their family's fire. Natsuo bit into his cheek to avoid grinning, but it wasn't working well, and even Fuyumi had nearly snorted on broth and had covered her mouth with a napkin.

Izuku's dismal mood went unnoticed by no one.

Quite literally.

At least seven people had stopped him in the hall to ask what was wrong and to offer to do him a favor, and that was before he even got to class. He had purposefully left early so he wouldn't have to walk there with Toshinori, which he felt guilty over, but he didn't feel like he could look the man in the face that morning. When he *did* get into

class, it was like a bunch of sharks had zeroed in on his sad demeanor. Momo and Ochako watched him walk over to their already-formed pillow pile with a frown, while Tenya and Hitoshi squinted at him and Shouto watched him with a tilted head. As soon as he sat down, Ochako leaned towards him. "Is something wrong, Izu?"

"It's nothing," he replied meekly, trying not to sound like a kicked puppy and failing detrimentally. Dark Shadow slithered up through the pillows to wrap around his shoulder as Fumikage came over.

"You seem sad," she- as they had recently discovered she liked to be referred to as- said, her own 'sad' expression flitting across her face. "Do you...wanna talk about it?"

"I'm okay, Dark Shadow, really!"

"Do not bother him, Dark," Fumikage said softly, making his Quirk look even sadder before she retreated to him.

Then *Aizawa* walked into the room.

Izuku tilted his head down and pretended to be going through a notebook, hoping the man wouldn't notice him. As usual, his eyes began to rove over every student in the room, and *of course* he noticed how multiple members of the class kept looking at him, and how his shoulders were more slumped than usual, and how he wasn't saying anything and his group wasn't either as they sat there in silence. Keigo entered shortly after, looking at Aizawa first and then noticing his frown, and picked up on the somber mood rather quickly, standing by the podium rather awkwardly as he tried to suss out what the issue was.

"Hey, guys," Ochako, bless her heart and soul, exclaimed abruptly, reaching behind her for something. "Let's do a puzzle! It's good for problem-solving!"

"That sounds excellent, Ochako," Tenya agreed, prompting their group to- thankfully- focus on the puzzle and not him as Tsuyu came in after Aizawa to join them.

Even so, he felt Aizawa's eyes on him at points throughout class, and when they let out for an early lunch that day- being that their free period sat just behind it- the man snagged him as he trailed after the others on his way out.

"Shimura," he said, a furrow in his brow, and it still felt weird to be

called that instead of 'Midoriya' or 'Problem Child.' Even Aizawa-sensei seemed to think so, as he knelt down and corrected himself. "Izuku. Is something the matter?"

"No, I'm fine, sensei." It came out too quiet and unbelievable. Izuku frowned at his own poor lying skills. He'd never had to lie to avoid people being concerned about him before.

Aizawa was unconvinced. He placed a hand on his shoulder, the suspicion in his expression growing. "Are you *sure*?" Yagi had been cheerful enough in the staff room that morning, so if he didn't know what was up- which he definitely didn't, because if he knew Izuku was depressed *he* would be depressed- something must have happened the evening before. But what could have taken place in the space of one night that put his Problem Child into such a sour mood when getting shot at, fighting a murderer, and finding his own father had betrayed him didn't?

Izuku hesitated before answering. That was just more proof the answer was a solid 'no,' even if it was already obvious. "Yeah."

Aizawa contemplated his options. He didn't feel like he was going to get anywhere trying to drag whatever the problem was out of the kid, so he could just go get Yagi. Yet something told him that may be embarrassing, if Problem Child had avoided him coming to school. Did it *involve* Yagi? Probably, in that case, so he would have to know eventually (and would anyway, considering he was the kid's *legal dad* now), but telling him right now might be the worse option. Get one of the kids to talk to him? Izuku hadn't seemed very talkative in class, and if Ochako or Hitoshi couldn't get him to talk then, Aizawa didn't think they could now.

He could ask Keigo, but he had a feeling he needed someone with a little more distance from the class in general.

"All right. Just know you can tell me if something *is* bothering you."

Izuku nodded his head without saying a word and walked towards the door. Yep, definitely something wrong.

Wasn't he friends with the Togata boy?

Izuku had chosen to spend his free period in a tree- there technically wasn't anything *in* the school code about sitting in trees- picking away at a bag of trail mix he'd bought. It was a nice option, because it was

quiet, no one was around, and he had a good hour to spend ignoring the rest of the world and his inevitable return to reality when he got out of the tree.

He set his bag of trail mix down. For some reason, though, the tree felt...fuzzy?

"Hey, Izuku!" boomed Mirio as his head rose out of the thick branch Izuku was sat on, the trail mix sitting squarely in his head. "Nice to *tree* you!"

"Mirio-senpai," Izuku began, in a long-suffering way, "are you doing a pull-up in a tree right now for the sake of a joke?"

"Maybe," Mirio told him with a shining grin, pulling himself up with his grip on the branch completely through it and folding his legs before letting himself sit down. It showed an impressive amount of upper body strength. "Did it *leaf* a good impression?"

"Ugh..."

"Ha-ha-ha!" Mirio laughed at his reaction before reaching over and folding an arm on his shoulder, leaning down with a friendly smile. "Sooo...a little birdy told me you're kind of upset about something. Peanut?" He took the bag off his head and held it out.

Completely missing the last part, Izuku jumped as if he'd been shocked. "Who said I was upset?" he exclaimed. "I'm not upset!"

Mirio stared at him. It occurred to Izuku that denying it so enthusiastically may look more fake than not. "Are you suuuuuuure?" the older boy finally asked, moving his eyebrows up and down even if he wasn't smiling anymore. Izuku couldn't help but sigh and slump over as he looked away. Trying to convince Mirio to let something go felt like pushing against a brick wall, but, then again, he didn't know anything about the situation Izuku had a problem with, and he probably wouldn't react like his classmates (such as Shouto threatening to ice anyone that upset him) so perhaps...

"I'm just...kind of bummed out," he mumbled out, feeling his neck flush. "Someone...important to my dad doesn't...like me."

(Somehow, even with his meticulous methods, he had completely missed the fact that Mirio worked with Sir Nighteye, because even Izuku was only human.)

"What? How could someone not like you, little buddy? You're so likable! Your hair is green!"

Well, he didn't see how that was a marker for likability. "My dad kind of...chose me for something, you could say," he said after a moment, trying to think of how to hedge around the topic of One For All. "And this guy is his old partner. He...doesn't think I'm a good choice, and he thinks I'll disappoint him..."

A furrow developed in Mirio's forehead. "...wait, his old partner? Are you...talking about Sir Nighteye?"

"Yeah," Izuku said, a bit relieved he didn't actually have to explain it. Mirio had never specifically mentioned being a fan of All Might, but he must have at least paid attention to him, if he knew of his old partner, he thought. Unbidden, tears started to gather in his eyes again. It wasn't so much the things Nighteye had said as it was the awkward air hanging over the entire day and everyone and their mother asking him about it. He just didn't *do* well with people noticing he was upset! He just needed to get over it, wallow in a hole somewhere by himself, and that always worked well enough. "I think he hates me."

"Wh- no he doesn't!" Mirio squawked, taken over by a sudden frantic sense Izuku didn't quite notice. "Why on earth would Sir hate you?"

"I *heard* him! He doesn't like me! He said it's a mistake, and All Might will regret choosing me, and-" Izuku paused to sniffle, desperately reaching up to press at his eyes. *Come on, stop being such a crybaby!* "He's one of Dad's only friends! I was really hoping he would like me! I don't even know how to have a dad, and I already messed something up!"

Mirio was straight-up panicking, now, waving his hands back and forth while Izuku slowly devolved into tears. "But- but that's impossible! He watched the Sports Festival and said you were really smart and clever and had amazing potential and all that stuff! And he never compliments anyone! And he said you were a good choice, and it was amazing you managed to 'pull out' so many Quirks or whatever, although I don't think I was supposed to hear him say that part because I was kind of eavesdropping but I'm pretty sure we're talking about the same thing and- hey, hey, don't cry, I swear he doesn't hate you-!"

"Yes he does," Izuku cried, so worked up now he completely missed

Mirio *admitting* to apparently knowing Nighteye well enough to eavesdrop on him, then lurched forward to propel himself out of the tree. He was just *more* upset now, and he wanted to be alone.

"Wait, little buddy! Come back!"

"Leave me alone, senpai, please! I want to be alone!"

"But really-!"

Mirio tried to chase him, but Izuku did have the advantage of literal flight, which the security camera staff graciously ignored.

Chapter End Notes

rip @ yall sorry for giving izuku angst, but my gremlin brain just won't conceive of zuku and nighteye meeting in a normal, stress free way 😞

me: izuku is so competent and badass here nighteye can't POSSIBLY disapprove of him as a choice
me to me: but what if they had a misunderstanding that makes their meeting angsty?
me to me to me: 😞😞😞
me to me to me to me: and gran torino isn't even here yet : ')

A Cautionary Tale

Chapter Summary

nighteye: stop taking responsibility for EVERYTHING
all might: stop taking responsibility for ME
izuku: having an emotional breakdown

Chapter Notes

the cautionary tale is don't run away from ur problems

The evening before-

When Mirai had first seen All Might blatantly admit to reporters he'd adopted a child on television, he'd been a little bit offended. He knew they hadn't parted ways on the *best* of terms, but not even telling him he'd gone and acquired a son? Toshinori needed to stop being such an introvert. He had made a point to ask Torino and Tsukauchi, as well, and they hadn't known either, so Toshinori really had just left everyone who knew him in the dark.

And of course, he wanted to meet the boy. He was Toshinori's son, obviously he did. Even if they weren't biologically related, family was family. Even if things were tense, Mirai still considered Toshinori family- he had left out of concern, of not being able to see All Might continually destroy himself, not because he hated the man. He had wanted to find a suitable successor that could carry on All Might's legacy and finally let him rest.

That desire brought another issue to the forefront of his mind. At first, it had made sense- why Toshinori had been so worried over an injured student when the boy had been shot, because he wasn't just a student at all. And Mirai's gut instinct was to want to meet the boy even more because of just *how* suitable he seemed- he was clever, in a way Toshinori himself wasn't. Analytical. Able to take a situation and create a route to the most efficient result. In only a few months, he'd been able to use multiple Quirks from past users of One For All, something Mirai hadn't even known was possible. But as soon as he started to think over that, he realized a problem.

One For All, by its very nature, was both a curse and a blessing. It meant responsibility; it meant taking on a legacy and commitment that would put the user in danger for most of their life. It was why

he'd trained Mirio so hard, why he had yet to tell him anything even now, because choosing to take on that commitment was something he needed to do as a competent Hero already.

All one had to do was look at what it had cost All Might. If he thought about the injuries the man had incurred long enough, because Mirai had seen them, up close, all those years ago, he could make himself feel sick. His mind presented a dilemma: what if the same thing happened to this boy, the man's *son*? It didn't matter, then, how competent he was, and how good of a choice he was for One For All. All Mirai could think about was the utter devastation it would wreak on Toshinori if One For All ended up taking his son in the end, too. Judging by his name, he was related in some way to the woman Toshinori had thought of as his own mother, and that would make it even worse. Even after all these years, Mirai knew Toshinori: he knew he would never stop blaming himself, he would never stop mourning, and he would hate himself forever if- in the worst case scenario- the kid ended up dying.

Shimura Izuku was young. He was kind-looking, with soft features and a smile that looked amazingly like Toshinori's. Imagining him in that way, not just as someone who cared for his father, but as an adult in general, made Mirai feel mildly sick.

He knew that, to some extent, he was being...hypocritical. Because, at times, a tiny part of himself had doubted whether he should recommend Mirio for One For All or not. But he had always pushed that part away, because, even if it was dangerous, he trusted the Hero Mirio was becoming, and he couldn't let his own feelings take precedence just because he had started to care about Mirio personally. And perhaps Toshinori felt the same way, but Mirai just couldn't bear to see the man undergo more heartbreak.

He was so starkly alone in the world. A few scattered friends, a dead mother, no family to speak of- All Might had traded a life in exchange for being the Symbol of Peace, but if he had finally found some form of happiness, Mirai didn't want it taken away from him. Hadn't Toshinori given up enough?

His feelings felt like they were boiling within him as he waited outside said man's door waiting for him to open it. This conversation was long overdue, he knew, but it didn't feel any easier with the distance they'd kept up.

When Toshinori did open the door, he looked...mildly better than

Mirai remembered. His face wasn't quite so thin. His eyebrows shot up in surprise when he saw Mirai standing there. "Nighteye?"

Mirai adjusted his glasses and nodded. Their conversation at the hospital, after that incident at a mall, had been awkward. They'd only focused on what had transpired that day, rather than anything personal. "Toshinori," he greeted, hoping he didn't sound too stilted. "I thought I should...talk with you. Do you have a minute?"

"Of course," Toshinori replied, opening his door further. "Come in."

The apartment inside felt cozy, for lack of a better word, if a little empty. There was a still-steaming cup of tea on the coffee table inside sitting beside a stack of what Mirai assumed to be student assignments being graded. There was nothing on the walls, but there on an end table sat a small picture frame holding what Mirai assumed to be a candid photo someone had taken of Toshinori and the Shimura boy.

It made him feel a little bit sicker. Losing him- for Toshinori, it would break him.

Even still, better that Nighteye lose a son than he did, after what he'd given the world-

"I thought we should discuss...everything. After what I saw on television, mind you," he began, his voice a little sarcastic. Toshinori smiled sheepishly as he returned to his place on the sofa, motioning for Mirai to take a seat in a chair. He was using a store-bought tea bag, as usual. He'd always been too lazy to buy fresh leaves and use them, even though they carried more flavor.

"Yes, I'm...sorry for not informing you. I suppose I just got used to keeping to myself, after a while..."

It was going to feel awkward no matter what he did, wasn't it? Mirai withheld a wince and adjusted his glasses again. "I admit I wasn't expecting you to find...a successor, let alone a son. He is...related to your teacher, isn't he?"

A wistful, small smile came over Toshinori's face. "Yes. He is. She had a daughter- one she gave up shortly after she was born. So he is her grandson. They actually live across the hall- they both remind me so much of her..."

That made Mirai feel even worse. He didn't want to make it appear as though he thought any ill of the boy himself, not at all- but Toshinori

had found the closest thing to family he could. Did he not deserve to live as long as he could happily with them? "I thought you seemed very attached to him," he said, gazing at the stack of papers on the table. He was using a green pen; of course he was. He probably thought red was too harsh. "He seems...a very smart child. He gave a good performance in the Sports Festival." He wondered if the boy could float. Was that the Quirk he had inherited from his grandmother? "I am glad you found him. However, I do admit I have some...misgivings."

Toshinori looked up at him and frowned. "Misgivings?" he asked, sounding hesitant- or maybe weary.

"Well- yes. Surely you've thought about it, Toshinori." He couldn't imagine that Toshinori *hadn't. Why* would he choose his own son for this? "If something were to happen to him- like it all so easily did to you-"

Toshinori's frown became deeper. "All For One is dead, Mirai," he said, in a more clipped tone.

"I know. But that does not mean there's no danger left in the world. If something happens to him-"

"It won't," Toshinori interrupted him, turning to look at his papers as he looked considering. "That may sound like denial, but I believe in him. I believe in his potential."

"I'm not saying you *shouldn't*." Like he'd known it would, frustration reared its ugly head. It was so easy to talk to people he didn't care for- to keep up a blank facade while being brutally honest with them- but one of his weaknesses was that he wasn't able to completely control his emotions when it came to people he *did* care for. "But I simply don't think it is wise to entrust this burden to your *son*, of all people." *I want you to be happy.* "One For All is a dangerous responsibility."

"I *know* that, Mirai."

His frustration grew. This always seemed to be the problem with Toshinori and him. Toshinori never *listened* to him. He hadn't listened all those years ago when Mirai begged him to find a successor rather than destroy himself further every day, and he wouldn't listen now. Why did he constantly insist on handling everything by himself?

"I'm only saying-"

"Is this all we came to do again, argue?" Toshinori asked tiredly, heaving out a sigh. Mirai snapped his mouth shut and sat there for a moment. He didn't *want* to argue, but-

"It's...it's late, Mirai. Can we not give it the night and talk again when our heads are fresh? I...still want you to meet him, to see his potential for yourself."

"Very well," Mirai replied, standing. Toshinori followed him to reach the door and open it for him. He was so *frustrated.* "I would wish with a clearer head you would listen to me when I try and warn you."

"*Mirai-"*

"Toshinori, I'm only trying to look out for you."

"Mirai, you know I appreciate the intent, but I just-"

"Toshinori. Please just listen to me when I say that this is a mistake. To entrust your Quirk to *that* boy-" Perhaps mistake was the wrong word, but Mirai just wanted him to *listen* for once. Izuku was more than just a successor- he was Toshinori's *son*, his family, someone who might give Toshinori himself grandchildren one day- an opportunity to be happy.

But Toshinori, like he tended to, kept on with what he believed, not seeing what Mirai meant. "He is the best choice!"

"It's a mistake. I don't want you to have to regret this." *You two shouldn't have to lose each other to this fate.*

"I won't."

"And if something happens- if he-"

"He won't!"

Mirai paused when Toshinori's voice became louder with frustration of his own. They stood there for a moment, both with frowns pulling at their lips, and he let out a quiet sigh.

"Good night, All Might," he muttered, admitting to himself that he simply wasn't going to get anywhere with this, and it was better to just leave. He would give up if it would become such a big deal with Toshinori, and not say anything, but he felt it was a disservice to just keep quiet- to not point out the obvious danger. Toshinori, above all

else, could be as stubborn as an ox; Mirai had only meant to convey his concern, to try and convince him he didn't have to give up *everything* in life, not argue pointlessly.

"Good night, Mirai," Toshinori muttered, something in his voice sounding regretful and bitter.

Mirai would give up and leave, but he would keep on worrying still, and he hoped that he never had to look into that boy's future and see him die.

Okay, the truth was, Hana didn't exactly have much to do outside of the League, so she didn't really mind helping out as often as she had begun to.

She had started hiking over to their shitty hideout every single day, then visiting the bar, then hassling a long-suffering Kurogiri for alcohol since he apparently had an endless supply of it, then hassling Hawks if he was around, then hassling Shigaraki before she left to go home to her empty one-bedroom apartment. It wasn't like there was a lot of things to do to make friends for twenty-one-year-olds who had never attended school and had no hobbies outside of being a shut-in on their computer all day. But hey, it worked for her, or at least it had for fifteen-something years until she met the League.

She wasn't involved in the dirty parts- she came over to give advice, explain plans, and replace the computer Shigaraki apparently kept breaking somehow, and occasionally dropped in one a video game tournament if Toga convinced her. As such, she hadn't really seen them all in action, but she had seen Toga eat a bird once, and she felt that was kind of a similar thing.

"Hey, Toga. What's so interesting?"

It wasn't like Toga to get too sucked into her screens. She preferred tromping about in real life, looking for things to stab, but right now she was sat at the bar with both her legs folded under her staring at a tablet Hana had given the League with a blank expression. Looking up, she swiveled in the chair and gave Hana a wide smile. "Oh, Hana-chan! Nothing! What do you wanna do today?"

"Why don't you get your computer so I can finish teaching you how to track a phone?"

Toga lit up. She gave her a nod and leapt off of her chair, sprinting

out of the room to retrieve the laptop Hana had given her- she liked to root through dumpsters for things to fix up- and Hana took the opportunity to walk over to the tablet and wake it back up.

*Well, that **is** interesting,* she thought, eyes roving over a short article about recent arrests a city over. There at the top read two people by the surname of Toga, who'd not only been convicted of neglect of their missing child but had openly admitted it. Eraser had probably put the fear of God into them to make that happen.

Knowing Toga, she would probably take at least ten minutes to actually *find* her computer in her mess of a room. There were still half-eaten sugar cookies from two days ago sitting on her table. Hana exited the main room of the bar and walked down the hall, where small storage rooms and an office had been converted into makeshift bedrooms. There weren't many League members around, but she did pass Dabi on his way to try and fail for the millionth time to filch some booze from Kurogiri (a running competition between them, Spinner, and Twice), and she put her fingers to her forehead in what was apparently a popular American insult to imitate 'L' for 'loser.' He gave her a scathing glare as he passed her.

Snickering, she headed for the room that everyone considered hers even if she refused to admit to it (even though she had fried Spinner's game system for going in when she'd left her bag inside, once). Usually only Toga came in and out to bother her- not that Hana minded being bothered. The girl was young, impressionable, fairly friendless-

Even though she really wasn't someone to look up to, at all-

"Capitalist simulator!" Spinner shrilled from a room she was passing. Like every weekday when most people their age would be doing something useful like attend school, he and Shigaraki were in another childish argument, which had probably been going on for a while, from the looks of it.

"For the last time, Spinner!" Shigaraki yelled, swatting at the other man-child's hand, which was pointing stubbornly at the DS in his hands, which unfortunately saw his pinky come down in his irritation. "It has a *point*!"

The DS turned to dust in his hand.

Hana paused, brain coming to a harsh halt.

That...didn't mean anything. Did it? It couldn't have meant anything- but it was so- so similar. It was...exactly the same. It was just like-

How often did people have absolutely identical Quirks? Theoretically, it was possible, wasn't it? But to be so similar...

She had never actually seen Shigaraki's Quirk before.

How could he have had *Tenko's Quirk?*

Stomach churning, she started walking again before either of them could notice her. It wasn't possible, she thought. Tenko- Tenko was dead. *He was reaching for her, terror and desperation written across his face, and she felt his fingers touch her hand, but for some reason- for some reason, he let go, screaming as he closed his eyes and collapsed into the floor that was crumbling around them. Her fear won, and she ran.* He was dead- they'd told her he was dead. He was gone, and she was a failure, a failure that hadn't even been able to take care of her little brother.

But Shigaraki had a mole on his face.

She felt- maybe not like an idiot, but like a fool as she rushed into her room, pulling the door shut and dropping to her knees as she started to go through her bag. A plain black gym bag carrying the *Armament* logo that also carried her entire life. All four sets of her clothes, her laptops, a DS, her wallet, and a cloth photo holder that held two pictures she hadn't looked at in six years even though she refused to leave them behind anywhere.

She flipped the holder open. On the right was a burnt photo of Shimura Nana and her son- one Hana had stolen once- with a piece of paper covering up her *asshole of a father*- on the left was a picture of her and her brother that her mother had taken once upon a time, the only reminder she had left, and though he was smiling, the resemblance was clear as day. All logic told her this couldn't have been anything resembling the truth, but she was sure, and she felt so *stupid*. Because she was so sure that she recognized her own brother, and yet how had she not noticed until it was thrown into her face?

It can't be right.

Shigaraki Tomura.

Shimura Tenko.

They were the same person.

The picture wallet tumbled out of her hands.

This was...she needed...*she couldn't do this.* Not him. Not her little brother. Hana couldn't *deal* with this.

Every bit of progress she'd made in forgetting that night was coming undone. All she could think of was his eyes, the look in them as he'd cried, how she'd lied and blamed him for stealing that shitty photo and how it had been *her fault, all her fault, and how she was such a failure-*

She nearly ran into Toga in the hall as she stumbled out of her room, pulling up short and raking in a harsh breath. The girl looked up at her in blatant confusion, arms wrapped around the pink laptop Hana had given her, looking, for once, almost innocent, trusting, naive-

"I-I've got, got to go do something, ok?" Hana stammered, hoping nothing showed on her face. "J-just- gonna get- get some air. I'll be back-" *Would she be back? Could she even look her brother in the face? When it was her fault he was here like this-* "-Later. Later."

She turned and raced down the hall as quickly as she could without making noise before Toga could answer her. She didn't *want* to deal with this. What kind of sick cosmic joke was it, that she just so happened to stumble into her baby brother's evil villain base trying to take down society?

She passed either Dabi or Twice on her way out. She wasn't sure which one, because it felt like she'd suddenly acquired tunnel vision and the only thing she could focus on was her route of escape. She stumbled out of the building the bar resided in and booked it, heading down the street for the closest train station, nearly vaulting over the railing down into the subway in her haste.

She'd forgotten her wallet, but there was never anyone watching for cheating in this part of town; she jumped over the partition to get to the train bay and let herself get lost in the mill of people climbing onboard, finding an empty seat in a corner and putting her face into her hands. People in this part of town tended to not ask questions, either. She rode in silence for what felt like forever.

The creak of the train as it came to a stop, and then slowly shut down, caught her attention.

What the hell? This train simply went in a loop around the city, to over fifteen different stops, and it ran twenty-four-seven- it shouldn't have been shutting off. When she looked up, and realized there was no one else in the compartment around her, and got to her feet, startled. When had everyone left? Was she that out of it? Had there been a maintenance announcement she'd missed? But even then...

The clock, just before it shut off, told her it was late afternoon. So she had only zoned out for a few hours. Surely an attendant would have checked the compartments for stragglers before they shut it down for maintenance?

Frowning, Hana made her way over to the doors and reached for the emergency lever. It took a good crank, as it felt rusty and old, but the doors came open, and she turned to exit the train.

It was then something shot forward and gripped her around the neck.

Hana wheezed, unable to draw in air. She reached up to claw at whatever was holding her almost instantly, but she had no time to react, and before she knew what was happening, the person lurking outside the train turned and tossed her at least a good five yards. She crashed into the floor, rolling and landing awkwardly on her wrist, spluttering and coughing as she came to a stop and frantically tried to regain awareness.

She looked up. There were at least five people spread out in front of her, blocking the station's exit area, wearing what looked like stark white body armor with masks that concealed their faces. She winced when several of them raised their weapons to point at her, long rifles that she would have bet used some type of dart or lance, and aimed red laser pointers at her face.

What the hell, she repeated to herself. Her arm was smarting, but she still tried to raise herself up on her hands. The attempt was met with who she assumed to be the leader of the group aiming a pistol at her.

"Shimura Hana," a woman's voice said, under a layer of voice modification, making her freeze. "Put your hands up and come peacefully. There is no need for conflict."

No need for conflict my ass, Hana thought, eyes darting around the bay. They were blocking the exit to the street, and there was no way she could fight her way through them all, even if she knew a little bit of self defense. But worse- how did they know who she was? They couldn't possibly have connected any of her online identities to

Shimura Hana, because she had stopped using that name a year after she ran away from the police station she'd wound up in after that horrible night.

How did they know? What did they *want?*

Well.

Fuck.

Where Do You Belong? (p1)

No one ever really saw Midnight coming, but Ectoplasm *especially* didn't see her coming when she swaggered up to his desk in the staff room and slapped something down on it. Even in full costume, she could feel the confusion radiating from his form as he looked up at her, temporarily abandoning the stack of math tests he was grading.

"'Plasm," she began, half reproachfully and a little loud. "You did *not* tell me you and Snipe already moved into Shimura's apartment building!"

The man in front of her tilted his head. "Pardon?"

"When you told me there was an apartment opening! You didn't say you already moved in there!"

"I was not aware you were interested in where I live." It wasn't said particularly rudely, but a bit of sarcasm had leaked into Ectoplasm's voice.

Midnight let go of the photo she'd tossed down- a selfie she and Joke had taken in their new apartment- and groaned dramatically, folding her hands over her eyes. "I was so embarrassed! I met Shimura-san and she told me she's expecting grandbabies-"

"What?"

"Seriously, don't you think all of us *and* Yagi is a bit much? I know Aizawa asked for someone to move there for extra protection if they could, but I had no idea you'd already done it! I don't want to make the little guy feel awkward, living with four teachers..."

"I do not think he particularly minds," Ectoplasm returned dryly, thinking of when he'd run into Shimura in the hall of their apartment building and the boy had started geeking out over his presence there. "And why are you giving me a photo of you and Ms. Joke?"

"Oh, well." Midnight dropped her hands and took a complete one-eighty in mood, smiling. "Since we're building buddies I thought you would so appreciate a picture of me and my lovely future wife for your fridge."

"Thank you for the...thought. To be honest, I am only surprised Aizawa didn't simply move in himself."

Midnight snorted as she leaned against the partition separating his desk from Snipe's. "They wouldn't fit. Takami sleeps on his couch half the time, so it's already cramped, and from what little Hitoshi was saying in the hall Aizawa's already got his eyes on *another* wayward child to adopt. I heard Mic say they're looking for a *house*."

"How domestic."

"I know!"

Midnight's eyes caught on movement on the other side of the room. Hawks- or Keigo, as she had to admit she called him in her head, because he just didn't look like a professional hero standing there with tiny wings still growing in and clothes she knew for a fact Hizashi had picked out- was staring at the window, frowning and looking particularly bothered. He just stood there for a moment, then, with an obvious hesitation, turned and hurried towards the door.

Whistling innocently to herself, she took out her phone and pulled up her text conversation with Aizawa.

"What are you doing?"

"Just giving 'Zawa a heads up that his bird son's running off somewhere looking ruffled."

"Perhaps he has business, Midnight. He *is* an adult, even if he is younger than us, remember."

"I know that," Midnight countered, twirling the Ms. Joke charm attached to her phone case. "But on the off chance that something is wrong, do *you* wanna be the guy that could have warned 'Zawa and didn't?"

Ectoplasm grimaced.

Hana was a hacker. It was her simple nature to look for solutions to problems, to come *up* with those solutions, to make and execute plans and, at times, react quickly to avoid danger. But she was always on the safe side of the screen- even when the stakes were high- and her solutions needed only eight fingers to work. Right here, right now, that was going to be a bit more difficult.

She bit into her lip to distract herself from the pain wracking her body. Even still, her brain was moving a mile a minute to look for any possible way out.

They were blocking the street exit. They may even have more people up above to block her on the off chance she slipped out. Naturally, her mind drifted to the train she had just stepped off of. It was a long shot, but if she could get back in, she could start running and reach the end and then- then run along empty track. It was a bad plan, she knew that. She probably couldn't outrun them. But what else was there to do?

The hand she was using to hold her aching side pressed down on something familiar in her pocket.

Hana paused. Her attackers were slowly stepping towards her, being cautious. She only had a few precious seconds now. But there in her pocket- it was one of Hawks' feathers. He'd handed them out one night, said to snap them in half if he was needed, but...would it even work if she used it? Could he still feel his old feathers, now that he was apparently growing new ones?

If he could feel it, would he even come?

She supposed she had no choice.

Hana bit into her lip as she slipped one finger into her pocket and felt the feather. Heroes never helped. They stood for the cameras and gloated and expected praise, but that was about it. She didn't like heroes, she didn't like villains; the world was full of people who only looked out for themselves. But- if there was even a chance Hawks might still feel this tiny old feather- she could only hope that he would come.

I can't get out of this by myself.

So she closed her eyes and lunged. She couldn't hesitate, not even a little bit, to have a chance, and she snapped the feather in half as she ran. The people behind her yelled and opened fire just as she threw herself with all the force she could muster through the train doors' windows.

Hana hit the floor as bullets littered the wall above her and flipped herself into a rough roll. It wasn't exactly elegant, but she knew she couldn't stop moving or else she was toast. Sprinting as fast as she could, she headed for the car farthest from where the attackers had

been standing and reached out with her hand to break the doors so she could bust through easily.

She was barely through when she heard them climbing into the car behind her. Heart pounding, blood rushing in her ears, she ran, her only advantage being it was harder to climb through the doorways after she left them falling apart and littered with rubble. A few bullets whizzed past her head, sheer luck being the only thing that saved her from getting a dart to the neck, and she couldn't find it in herself to be relieved when she busted through the last door and leapt off the back of the train. Now there was just empty tunnel ahead of her, and nothing to shield her from them from behind.

Run. Run. Run. Just keep running.

If he comes-

She couldn't trust a hero to come and save her. She couldn't trust *anyone* to come and save her. Being saved was something that happened in fairy tales, and Hana's life had always been the farthest thing from a fairy tale.

But as she heard them exit the train behind her, she couldn't help but foster a small shrivel of hope. A red light bounced off the wall ahead of her and then disappeared. It was aimed directly at her back, now, she knew, and she was out of chances.

Keigo almost thought he was going crazy when he felt it.

He hadn't thought his old feathers were still- well, active. He'd swept them up and tossed them in the trash, for the most part, though he still found one in the couch occasionally. But, as the day neared its end and he stood at the desk that had been given to him, about to start getting ready to head home- *and wasn't that weird, having a home to go back to that felt like a home-* he could have sworn he felt it. A jolt, running straight down his spine, and danger bells going off in his head urging him to fly and fly fast.

Something in his gut knew it was one of the feathers he'd given to the League. And- well, that wasn't just something he could tell anyone about.

But- if someone needed him-

He hesitated only for a minute before he left the staff room, and then

began to leave the building. As he went, his steps began to fall faster and faster, urgency coursing through him and some primal gut instinct telling him he *needed* to *move*. Something was wrong, he knew it, and if he was late- if he was too late-

I have to fly.

He emerged outside and let his still-growing wings stretch out. They were too small. Too small, dammit, and he needed, he *needed* to fly-

No, he *had* to.

Maybe it was adrenaline, maybe it was force of will, or maybe it was a mixture of both, but he felt the skin of his back tear as new feathers emerged into the waning sunlight and his wings spread out. It hurt, a distant part of his mind noted, but he was focused enough on getting off the ground that he barely felt it. With one movement, he lifted off and took off at a great speed, shooting through the sky towards where he'd felt his feather.

The call took him into the city. Down a street that was blocked off for construction, into a subway entrance with a beat cop guarding it because of the "closed" signs- *but why would that be necessary?*- down underground and into a broken train. And there it ended, but he followed the trail of broken metal and glass, hearing it before he saw it.

"Take the shot- take her down-"

"Stop where you are!"

Quiet, desperate gasps for air as someone ran ahead of him in the darkness and all too familiar figures pointed weapons at them. There was a red beam focused on their back. The agent aiming pulled the trigger.

But Keigo was faster.

Hana gasped for breath when she was lifted off her feet and air rushed around her. Her ear popped, everything flipped upside down for a split second, and a warm body was suddenly pressed up against her, leaving her scrambling to figure out what had happened. The shouts of her attackers were distant somehow, even though they'd just been gaining on her- just been right behind her-

She became dimly aware of something sharp pressing into her side. It

didn't hurt, but the hands holding her felt like they had claws. Then, she made out the subtle almost-glow of golden eyes.

"Hawks?" she whispered, thinking it was too good to be true. That he had actually made it there, that she wasn't about to get shot or something worse. The golden eyes blinked at her.

"Hey," Keigo whispered back, realizing in full exactly where he was and what he'd done. He'd acted without thinking, seeing danger in front of him. He was crouched on a maintenance platform in the tunnel now, Hana in his arms, his wings curled around them protectively as the distant yelling slowly came closer. "I felt you break my feather."

"Oh." The woman wasn't saying much, but she looked pale, even in the darkness, and she was subtly shaking. She was staring at Keigo like he was a ghost. "...thanks. I...I don't know who they are."

"Well." Keigo looked up and moved his left wing, eyeing the tunnel where he'd flown in. He'd snatched her up and shot past the team by at least a mile. "Unfortunately, I do. *Who* they are doesn't really matter, but what they are does. The HPSC- they use teams like that for...things they want kept quiet. They have no connections, no ties back to the Commission- they can function as a suicide squad if need be. They don't have personal identities. Usually they...kill dangerous people, or cover things up, when the HC doesn't want any leads back to them. But those guns- they're for...capture, not assassination. What...exactly did you do to get on their list?"

Hana bit into her lip. "They know my real name," she murmured, making Keigo look at her in surprise. "It's not connected to anything I do online. I don't think they know about Armament or anything I've done."

"And...your real identity is more dangerous than your vigilante one?"

"...Shigaraki is...my brother."

Keigo nearly dropped her right then and there. "Huh?" he squawked, staring at her face in the dark and searching for any sign she was possibly joking. She just continued to stare into space, looking lost. "Right. Okay. Yeah. Uh. That might do it. I...I don't know the details, but I got the feeling they were interested in Shigaraki, for some reason. I figured there must have been a reason they sent me to spy on him and not whoever *he* reports back to." And there had to be someone, because Shigaraki was an asshole sometimes but almost

ferally protective of keeping anyone in 'his League' from talking to or so much as thinking about whoever he was connected to. "Any idea how they found out?"

"No idea, considering I only realized today," Hana muttered at him.

"...Right. So...does that mean you're a Shigaraki too-?"

"No," Hana bit out, finally regaining enough sense to reach up and rub at her temples, mourning how much of a fucking mess she was in. "Just- just call me Hana, okay." Keigo looked at her in surprise again, but said nothing. "I...I really don't know how they found out. I haven't used my full name in...a long time."

"Well- I don't know if the why really matters. The Commission's got some sneaky bastards in it, and they've got their fingers in more pies than anyone knows. Actually- if they've been keeping an eye on Shigaraki, they might have noticed you by proximity."

He saw something knowing enter the woman's expression. "If they knew his real name," she murmured, rubbing at her wrist, where a rash was starting to form. "And they took notice of me, and realized I was going by Hana...it wouldn't be a hard guess at all. Fuck." Her scratching intensified, and suddenly, Keigo felt entirely dumb, because she reminded him so much of Shigaraki it seemed impossible to not be related to him.

Hana looked down at herself and grabbed her wrist, heaving a harsh sigh. *Fucking psoriasis.* Stress-itching right now wasn't helpful. "Can- can you get us out of here?" she asked, resolutely ignoring the tremor in her own voice. "There's five of them, and...and they probably have real bullets for you."

Keigo's body went tense. He breathed in quietly, listening to the sounds of the agents running down the tunnel, and straightened up. "Don't worry," he muttered. "I can see them. Just hold on tight."

"How the fuck can you see them? It's pitch black in here- I can barely even see you-"

Hana paused. She *could* barely see him, she thought, because of that slight little glow to his eyes. His eyes that now sported pupils blown wide, and when he blinked-

Fuck, does he have more than one eyelid?

There was something on his face- more markings around his eyes. She couldn't quite make them out, but something had changed, that was clear. Whatever drugs he'd been on must have been fucking his Quirk up more than even she'd thought.

Hawks didn't give her another warning before he stepped off the ledge. Hana yelped and grabbed onto his neck, feeling a rush as they started to hurtle through the air again, and willed herself not to get sick.

More yelling, and then gunfire, but Hawks didn't stop once, and suddenly, they were in the sunlight again.

Toga debated for a little while on whether to check out Hana-chan's room or not. And by "a little while," she meant five whole minutes, which she thought was rather impressive given her track record of "not at all" when it came to her urges. Mr. Compress was always telling her she could benefit from being more patient, and that was an improvement, wasn't it? Five whole minutes!

But, she didn't really want to wait at all, because Hana-chan had definitely been upset when she left. Toga could tell. Nothing ever bothered Hana-chan- she was unflappable! But something had definitely been bothering her when she ran out, not even acknowledging Dabi as she left, and she usually always made fun of Dabi when she could.

So Toga went into her room to look for clues. There wasn't anything there but the cheap cot Hana sometimes slept on and her bag, and Toga didn't want to make her mad by going through her things, but she also wanted to know where she'd gone. Clothes, computers, some games. There were a few pictures sitting on top of the bag, pictures of people who she could only guess used to be important to Hana-chan, even though she'd never talked about them. Toga's guess was that it hurt. Hana-chan was alone, just like the rest of them, after all.

Just her luck, both Compress and Kurogiri were in the bar when she toddled in holding Hana's (quite heavy) bag in her arms. Toga could handle herself pretty well, but sometimes things came up that adults were better at dealing with. If Hana was in trouble, she figured that Compress and Kurogiri would help. She'd had no luck trying to get into the older girl's computers or phones.

"Is that Armament's bag, Toga?" Compress asked when he saw her, looking curious. He was holding one of the extra fancy glasses

Kurogiri kept on the top shelf. At one of the tables, Spinner and Twice looked up from the card game they were playing (and Twice somehow losing, because Spinner kept bluffing him out despite having terrible hands).

"She left it in her room," Toga explained, setting it down on the bar. "She never leaves it *anywhere*, but she left a while ago looking really upset. She said she was going to teach me more about computers, and she was fine, but then when I came back she just looked like she was going to cry!" Compress frowned slightly, gently setting his glass down, and stood up, walking over to survey Hana's belongings. "She said she was coming back, but she didn't even take her wallet."

"That is rather strange," Compress agreed with her, softly leafing through the items on top of the bag that seemed the most important so as not to disturb more than needed. He knew exactly how many phones Hana had, and knew she only used one wallet, and knew she was undoubtedly protective of any items she had never let them see, so why had she left it all there? "Do you have any idea what might have upset her?"

Toga visibly thought for a moment, biting her lip and rolling her eyes towards the ceiling. "Umm...no," she said at length, shaking her head. "Maybe it was something online..."

A low grumbling caught her attention. Turning, she spotted Tomura coming in through the other doorway, hand rubbing at his neck as he mumbled under his breath. When he caught sight of them he squinted, the bags under his eyes seeming more pronounced than usual. "What're you doing?"

"Hana-chan got upset and left, but I don't know why," Toga replied before Compress or Kurogiri could say anything, a pout settling on her lips. What if something was really wrong, she thought? She didn't want Hana to stop coming around. When she did, it was like having a sister who actually liked her! "She even left all her stuff, see?"

Tomura wandered over to them with an indecipherable frown. Toga couldn't tell if he was worried or not- probably not, considering it was Shiggy, but he did at least seem interested in why Hana was absent, reaching out to flick open her wallet and frowning further when he saw she hadn't taken any of her cash. "The fuck you don't just call her for?"

"She didn't take her phone!"

Tomura grumbled again under his breath. By chance, he picked up the picture wallet Toga had found, and as soon as he opened it up, she could feel something change.

It almost felt like the air became colder. Tomura froze, head to toe, not moving a centimeter as he stared down at the photos with widened eyes. Something about it seemed extremely eerie. She had never seen him react like that to anything. His pupils had gotten bigger, he didn't seem to even be breathing, and Kurogiri and Compress were starting to look particularly concerned now.

"It's her," Tomura whispered out after what felt like minutes of silence, hands starting to shake as he suddenly jerked his head up, the wallet held tightly in four fingers as he turned to look at her, almost manic. "*Is this hers?"*

"Uh- um- yes-"

"*Where did she go?"* Tomura demanded, stepping closer to her. Confused, Toga simply stared at him, not understanding his change in behavior. "Toga! This is fucking important! Where-" He dropped the wallet, letting it flutter onto a bar seat, and grabbed ahold of her jacket, making her jump in surprise. His pinkies weren't touching her, and she wasn't too worried about him decaying her, but still, it wasn't like he ever touched her much, let alone when his eyes looked so crazy. "Where *is she?"*

"I don't know!" Toga parroted, feeling a surge of something...bad. She felt...guilty. After all, she was the last one to see Hana-chan. She should have run after her. Hana would have done that for her, right? "I don't know!"

Tomura let go of her. He was panting, like he'd exerted himself somehow, eyes wide and bloodshot as he reached up to scratch at his neck. "It's her, it's her, it's *her*," he mumbled to himself, turning away from her while Compress watched him worriedly. "I have to find her, I have to...Kurogiri, I have to *find* her, we have to-"

"Young Tomura, please calm yourself. I assure you we will locate miss Hana-"

"You don't get it! She's-"

"Uh, hey, Shigs?" Spinner called awkwardly from his table, looking like he was sucking on a lemon when Toga looked at him. Across from him, Jin was staring at the wall, blinking and rubbing at his eyes. "I,

uh, found her."

"What?" Tomura demanded, neck cracking as he whipped around, and Spinner pointed hesitantly at the television where Jin was staring. The volume was down low enough it hadn't caught their attention yet.

"She and Hawks are, uh, on TV."

Toga whirled to see if he was right. Sure enough, a news broadcast was playing as camera footage from a helicopter highlighted none other than Hawksy, her meat buddy, wings all shiny and better than ever as he held two blades to ward off five figures encircling him on a rooftop. A woman with her hoodie pulled up and arms raised to shield her face was behind him, but she knew it was Hana easily enough.

"Nothing is currently known about the mysterious assailants attacking Pro Hero Hawks, or the civilian in his care, but- dammit, Tai, raise up!"

The helicopter swerved as a large gust of fire engulfed the rooftop and surrounding airspace. "Hawksy!" Toga found herself yelling, unaware she was doing it, as she lunged forward as if to teleport herself through the screen to help.

"Kurogiri-"

"Compress, please go get Dabi. I will form a warp portal immediately."

Elsewhere, Aizawa paused as he swung across a rooftop in pursuit of the direction Keigo had apparently flown from Yuuei in, pulling his phone from his pocket as it vibrated. He had certain alerts set up for any news involving people close to him- and, of course, because the universe had decided to *give* everyone close to him the worst luck in the world, there was a ping for Hawks. His eyes narrowed as he briefly surveyed the video playing and the sun waned.

Villains typically weren't faceless, bland figures that relied heavily on support equipment. He had a feeling another option was much more likely, considering.

He ran a hand across the knife sheathed at his belt. The light was dying, and it would make it much harder for any cameras to see the fight, if he needed to do something necessary to keep Keigo safe.

Aizawa had made himself responsible for him, given his word that he would protect him from any further interference in his life, and he would ensure that word was kept.

No matter what cost he himself had to pay.

Where Do You Belong? (p2)

Chapter Summary

details now, emotional fallout next chapter (´∀ `)

Chapter Notes

p.s. advertising a new shouto centric fic I started! https://archiveofourown.org/works/27648380/chapters/67652114

Hana held tight to Keigo's body for a moment, squinting against the harsh late-afternoon sun, and gave herself space to recollect herself- again. It wasn't exactly easy flying around at Hawks-speed all of a sudden- it made her appreciate why they'd given him goggles and sound-buffering earmuffs, though he didn't seem bothered in the air right now.

When she opened her eyes, they immediately went round. Hawks' new wings had grown back new and improved, it looked like- they were splattered with golden specks that shimmered in the light, and there were a few subtle patches around his eyes. It was, ridiculously, almost like he'd given himself glitter makeup or gone too heavy with an eyeshadow.

It was pretty, but she wouldn't admit that. "What are you now, a vampire?" she asked, wincing when he angled them to glide towards a part of the city further away from the subway. "Seeing in the dark, sparkling in the sun..."

The man rolled his eyes at her, and yep, he definitely had more than one set of eyelids now. "Oh, please-"

He jerked and then suddenly swerved into a roll, making her yelp. Not a half a moment later electricity whirred past them through the open air, making him twist his head around to survey the area behind them with a scowl. There were two members of the mercenary team, flying with what looked like jet packs, in hot pursuit, aiming weapons that looked much *larger* than their guns.

The one *not* aiming something that could shoot raw electricity aimed his weapon, discharging a swift bullet of air that had Keigo ducking towards the buildings below. "I'm setting us down," he yelled over the wind, readjusting his grip on her as he prepared to let go. "Start

running once you touch down."

Hana typically wasn't one to let others fight her battles, but in this situation, the only thing running through her head was *Sure, good luck buddy.* Keigo landed and half-threw her forward; she stumbled a few steps but took off running, making her way across the rooftop towards a ladder leading down into the alleys. If she could hide, she could sneak her way away from them.

Before she could make it across the roof, another one of the mercenaries popped up from the side of the building and aimed her weapon at Keigo. Hana paused, without entirely meaning to, because she could hear him dodging blasts of air and electricity and she had no idea if he would see the third one. She twisted around mid-step. "Hey, watch out-!"

Keigo raised his hand, without looking, and sent a barrage of feathers towards the third agent. She landed on the edge of the roof and stumbled as they knocked into her, tearing into her suit and damaging her jet pack. The weapon in her hands misfired into the air and let loose some kind of energy blast.

Fuck bullets, that looks way worse, Hana thought, swearing under her breath as she started running. It was probably stupid, but she had an opening, and she wanted payback for getting tossed around.

Seeing as she was just running straight at the agent's face, of course, she saw her coming, but started to fumble to reach for her sedative gun instead of the high-powered blaster that had incinerated part of a balcony. They wanted her alive, Hana thought, and that gave her one tiny advantage in the realm of time. It gave her enough time to lunge up onto the roof edge and grab onto the woman's suit and gun, respectively, with a feral grin.

The agent's grunt of surprise trickled into her real voice as her suit was demolished, crackling and becoming dead, sagging weight as it fell apart on her body. "See ya next time, asshole!" Hana hissed, giving her a good shove that sent her tumbling over the side of the building.

The mercenary twisted in midair and ripped off one glove, pointing a hand at her. Hana tried to jump back, knowing they all probably still had Quirks to utilize as well, but she wasn't fast enough to evade the woman's fingers literally *extending far enough to wrap around her leg,* like *rubber,* and *fuck*, that was so weird, holy shit-

She yelped and went crashing to the concrete with the added weight.

Before it could drag her too far towards the edge, a mid-sized feather whirled through the air and severed the agent's hand, drawing a short but harsh scream from her. Smoke was still billowing from Hana's destruction of her suit, and the feather whipped back off to go back to Keigo through it as soon as she was safe.

She was nearly back on her feet when something shoved her from behind. Lo and behold, another feather, and she would have been annoyed if they weren't saving her life. "Hana! Duck!"

Hot orange flame shot across the roof from one of the corners. Hana swore again, feeling like a broken record, plastering herself to the floor and crawling away from the heat. She got to her knees, then stood, using the roof edge for balance, as Keigo landed beside her, two large feathers in hand to serve as swords.

"Are they fucking insane?" she demanded, watching the full squad spreading out on the roof in front of them. Even the one who'd had her *hand* cut off hadn't given up yet. "They're attacking us in broad daylight!"

Keigo's face twisted into something sour. "Unfortunately, the Commission doesn't have anything to lose here," he said, sounding bitter as he edged half a step closer to her. He hadn't been hit, as far as she could tell, and while he'd so far injured all of them to some extent, it had to have been difficult to deal with them all and make sure they didn't hit her simultaneously. The only reason he'd landed, she knew, was because an aerial battle wasn't a good idea, considering he didn't want to drop her or crash with her, but seeing as giving her time to flee wasn't an option, it was starting to look like they would have to both run away. Well, not like she had a problem with that. "It's a win win situation. This squad has no ties to the HPSC, so even if they are caught and fail in their mission, there's no repercussions. If they do succeed and abduct you, it just looks like someone random did it. If they kill me in the process, well, they get rid of a rogue agent and get to laud the danger of villains and the need for more hero oversight."

"Well, that's...bullshit." The retort felt lame, but she couldn't come up with anything else. Just then, her eyes fell on something even more bothersome in the sky; a news helicopter was hovering nearby, no doubt to catch the drama, and she groaned as she yanked her hoodie up and shielded her face. "Fuck."

Keigo's eyes drifted towards the sun. He was starting to angle himself

towards her. She didn't need a verbal confirmation to know she ought to get ready to take a trip through the sky again.

The bulkiest agent swung the tail end of his weapon. There were two large tanks on his back, so she guessed what he was doing easily enough; Keigo lunged just as another burst of fire shot across the roof, large enough it forced the helicopter to swerve.

Despite being ready for it, the air still shot out of her lungs when Keigo rammed into her. As he lifted into the air, he flexed his wings, tilting them at an odd degree. She could see each individual little feather shuffling, as if searching for the right angle, then the gold decorating each positively glowing as they reflected sunlight too bright to look at into each agent's visor. Hana cringed and clenched her eyes shut as Keigo took off again, darting down into the alley behind them to fly without being seen.

"You know what I said!" she yelled, wincing when one of her ears popped. "Vampire!"

"I noticed they could reflect light when I was fighting with the flamethrower," Keigo yelled back. "I think I've got the hang of it, almost."

Hana couldn't help but be a bit impressed he'd taught himself a new feature of his own Quirk in the space of one fight. Before either of them could think too much on it, however, she realized that the sun was rapidly going down, and she could still hear the distant sound of four high-powered suits following them, even if they had quite the way to catch up.

Keigo abruptly swerved into a darkened alley and touched down. He tucked his wings in, staying within the shadows, and let her down, looking pensive and tense as he waited. Hana crouched down and listened as hard as she could.

She grimaced when she came to a realization. "Are they...getting closer?"

"Yeah," he replied, looking grim. "I'm guessing that they planted some kind of tracker on you way before they first made contact." The long time she'd spent on the train zoned out flitted through her brain, making her frown. "It's probably too small to find. Normally, I'd say book it back to the hideout and burn everything you're wearing, but..."

"That could lead an HPSC hit squad right to our door?"

"Which means we need to either lose them and lose the digs fast enough to get away, or take care of them completely, but I'd rather play it safe. Our best bet is that mall a city over. I can get us there fast enough to get something to wear and to disappear after, since I'm sure you don't want to sneak into the hideout naked." She glared at him, making a teasing smile appear on his face for the first time that evening.

Well, she supposed it was a good thing she'd run out without any of her stuff, in that case. She hardly wanted to replace everything in her bag.

He opened his mouth to continue, but just then, an explosion in the distance startled them both. He snatched her arm as she unintentionally reached for his sleeve, looking around with narrowed eyes. "...was that-"

"Wait. That- was a news chopper, right?"

"...you don't think-"

Hana leveled him with a *what do you think? yes, those harebrained idiots would absolutely come running after us after seeing this shit on TV* look.

"Pretty sure you're contractually obligated to go check it out anyway, hero," she pointed out, making a crease form in his brow. He looked at her, then back up and to the sky, biting into his lip as he contemplated. She would never admit it, but it actually felt a bit...good, that he knew his obligation to help anyone the agents might be attacking and *wanted* to go help anyone the agents might be attacking but was still concerned with *her* safety foremost. As the seconds ticked by another explosion shook the air, however, closer this time, making the decision for them both.

"...all right. Let's go check it out."

Coming across the League of Villains *yet again* hadn't exactly been in Aizawa's plan for the night, but it had seemed to be happening to him more and more as of late. He spotted Toga and the one with a mutation Quirk running into an alley just as he dropped into one himself; they were chasing after something, probably one of the armed agents that had been on television. He had no idea why they were there, but he did take great offense to the agent he himself had been tailing for about twenty seconds aiming a weapon in their direction. Armed hit squad trying to kill innocent people versus a teenaged

vigilante? Yeah, he would side with the teenager.

The merc yelped when he aimed a powerful kick at her wrist, knocking the gun aside. She was missing a hand from something, so she didn't have much else to defend herself with as he sent his capture weapon snaking out to yank her to the asphalt. It was easier than it should have been, too, since her equipment seemed to be broken. The higher-power rifle on her back was useless.

He bent down and leaned forward, narrowing his eyes. "If you give me information that can help now, I can try and ensure you a-" vaguely- "-lighter sentence than your teammates. If not, I can do everything in my power to ensure you go to Tartarus for the rest of your life. Your choice."

Calm but cold eyes stared back at him from behind a broken visor. The agent seemed to consider for a moment, then she tilted her jaw at an odd angle and bit down on something.

Aizawa jolted in surprise. Her eyes widened for a moment, then went dull as her head went limp. Realizing what she'd done, he pulled his weapon back with a frustrated growl, leaving her body sitting on the street. *Of fucking course. The Commission won't let any bit of info out.*

Whoever was pulling the strings in the Commission had made a squad of faceless mercenaries that would do anything asked of them, including take their own lives to avoid capture. It made him sick. Disgusted, he burst into the next alley over, following the noise.

Two more agents were there. One was shooting at something at the other end, probably the League members he'd just seen, and the other was following him, his back open. Aizawa lunged forward without a second thought and came slamming into him. The agent grunted in surprise and stumbled, falling because of the weapon winding around him and tripping him up. They went crashing to the concrete with a clatter; Aizawa yanked him so he landed on his back, pressing one knee into the man's shoulder and keeping one hand taut on his capture weapon. The other, he used to grab ahold of the man's helmet and rip it off.

He took his knife from his belt. Before this one could kill himself too, he jammed it into his mouth between his clenched teeth, drawing a gurgle of surprise. Turning it so the blade pressed into the man's gum, Aizawa scowled as he practically snarled into his face. "You're going to give me information, and you're going to do it *now*."

Defiant eyes narrowed at him. He pulled on his weapon, putting pressure on the arm he'd dislocated on the way down. A definite hiss exited the agent's mouth.

"Useless," he spat back, making Aizawa's scowl deepen.

On the one hand, he could see how much it took to make the man cry, but on the other, he feared these agents had been desensitized to far more torturous things than he would do. They were the Commission's fucked-up little death squad- he may not be able to get anything out of them at all. But he couldn't pinpoint Keigo's location.

"-Mr. Eraserhead! Look out!"

His head snapped up. The other agent's form was falling towards them, as he appeared to be thrown off his feet, and he lunged backwards to avoid it. He recoiled his capture weapon and let the two agents slam together.

The one who'd fallen looked up as he collected himself. He seemed to abandon the gun he'd been using, choosing to take him on by hand as he stood and suddenly flashed forward, almost like he'd teleported, closing the gap between them. Aizawa's Quirk activated in an instant out of instinct; the man jerked to a stop, but didn't seem surprised, jumping at him. Despite their reliance on technology, they seemed skilled in every area of fighting, and he managed to knock Aizawa's knife aside. Fine, then; if he had to pummel him to unconsciousness he would.

They were locked in a stalemate, trying to dislodge the other's grip, when movement in the corner of Aizawa's eye caught his attention. An even more distracting yell almost made him flinch. "Mr. Eraserhead~!"

He *did* flinch when his knife skewered the agent's neck from behind, making the man's eyes bulge. Blood splattered on him as a result, though it thankfully spewed onto his shirt, mostly, instead of his face. Toga, grinning widely, planted a foot against the man's back. "Don't worry! I got him!"

While taking them in for interrogation was Aizawa's first choice, he couldn't entirely blame her for jumping the gun. She had, after all, clearly come across the alley only to help him, and she couldn't exactly pull the agent off, with her size. All she'd known her entire life was violence, and these agents were clearly willing to use violence against them.

He spotted the other agent on the ground groaning as he tried to get to his feet. He was glancing in Toga's direction, and to avoid any *completely* unnecessary bloodshed, Aizawa disposed of the dead weight that couldn't be saved and rammed his palm into the man's forehead, driving his neck further back onto his knife and then ripping it off as he turned, using the momentum to his favor. Toga stumbled and yelped in surprise, but he ignored it as he let the body fall and went for the other. Before he could, a sword skewered the agent in the head.

He looked over to where the lizard-Quirked person was. He had thrown the blade, surprisingly accurately, and looked awkward when Aizawa looked at him. "Uh...sorry?"

As if he was expecting personal apologies *now*. Twitching, Aizawa glanced over to where two other members were standing just as awkwardly, just watching them. It was the man in a mask and the woman in sunglasses.

"Here you go, Mr. Eraserhead," Toga chirped cheerfully, skipping up to him and holding out his bloody knife. He resisted the urge to sigh.

"Keep it," he grumbled, waving her off, and unintentionally making her light up like he'd announced an early Christmas.

"Really?! *Guys*, Eraserhead gave me his knife!" He didn't know why she was whispering. He was right next to her.

He leveled his stare at who he assumed to be the oldest, or at least most stable personality-wise. "Explain."

"Uh," the sunglasses-adorned woman replied. "We're kind of confused ourselves...what exactly are *you* doing here?"

"Getting my adoptive son out of whatever mess this is."

"Adopted son?"

"Am I correct in assuming whoever he was protecting just so happens to be a member of your group?"

The vigilantes- that was the only thing Aizawa could really call them, considering they hadn't seemed to commit many truly criminal acts- glanced at each other. Finally, the woman spoke again. "Maybe we should explain on the way. We went after these two, and Mr. Compress and Kurogiri went after another. Shigs and Dabi split off,

too. Surely we'll find lil Hawks and- uh- our friend with either of them..."

Aizawa narrowed his eyes and thought before nodding. "Fine. You lead the way, then." Behind him, Toga danced around excitedly while giving the lizard-Quirked member increasingly giddy looks. The League members all shifted about, clearly unused to the idea of a hero being flat out willing to work with them. "Can I at least get code names to call each of you?"

Even though they'd been as careful as they could, they'd still had the shitty luck of happening upon the flamethrower guy. He'd taken them by surprise, somehow, unleashing a torrent of flame that forced a swearing Keigo to shield her with his left wing, which left much of it burning as he hissed and threw himself into a fight. He couldn't fly anymore, however, at least not properly while carrying her, so they were stuck in a literal firefight with the agent.

Even in what was now darkness, Hana's sharp eyes could make out what she was sure was Quirk usage on the agent's end. She did her best to stay out of the way while Keigo danced around him, trying to find openings for his feather blades, his unfortunate match forcing him back with fire when he got too close. Every time Keigo veered too near, he stumbled a bit, something Hana figured had to do with throwing off his balance. Even so, he was too skilled to be thrown off completely, but it left him in a frustrating stalemate while the growing fire in the enclosed space slowly chipped away at his remaining feathers.

He *might* be able to win, but Hana didn't like to bet on maybes, even if they were highly likely. She found herself swearing as she watched the fight. The equipment was the problem, really; if only they'd found someone who had a water gun. What could they do, drench him? So he'd be a wet bird. At least his feathers wouldn't be turning to cinders. But, if she didn't do something- she was afraid he would be all cinders.

At that moment, Keigo flipped and landed across the alley from her, stumbling but catching himself; the agent seemed to be able to activate his Quirk every fifteen seconds. That left the perfect opening for her. Rushing from her cover, Hana sprinted towards the agent's exposed back.

Keigo looked at her with wide eyes as she jumped, hands outstretched.

The agent turned, but before he could fire, she reached for the base of his gun. There were cords connecting it to the tanks on his back, making it one unified system, and if she could just take it out-

Her pinkie came down on the gun. Then she *burned.*

The crackle of her Quirk working and the tanks exploding nearly covered the sound of her bloodcurdling scream. Fire exploded in every direction, up her arm, across part of her neck and just over the edge of her cheek, sending her into agony as she fell backwards. Her throat felt hoarse, like she'd dumped acid down it; smoke billowed into the air, joining the smoke that was already there and starting to become too thick from everything burning in the alley to see the sky.

The agent was stumbling to the side. His pack was on fire, but his suit seemed to protect him. Keigo lunged and went sailing past him, catching her before she hit the asphalt, his voice breaking as he swore. "*Goddammit-"*

"S'it look bad, doc?" Hana found herself croaking, feeling like she was hovering outside of her body. Tears stung her eyes as Keigo wrapped his arms around her and pulled her closer. He turned to look at the agent, eyes flashing, and *snarled*, low and enraged. Hana almost couldn't feel the wound at all, past the initial shock and pain. She prayed it hadn't destroyed her hand. She needed it, to help Tenko, to help the League-

Keigo looked halfway to murder when she heard it- a different, nearly hysterical voice at the end of the alley. "What the *fuck*-!"

Tenko.

Half delirious, Hana tried to look. Her previous panic wasn't on her mind. She just wanted to see him, at least see him- but everything was just a bit too bright and fuzzy. The agent moved backwards, away from them, but then he bumped into something. She turned bleary eyes on a dark form she recognized as Dabi when it spoke.

"Hey there, big fella," he drawled, looking up into the agent's visor with something cold and apocalyptic in his expression. "You like playing with fire?"

He smiled, a vaguely disturbing sight, and then opened his palm against the man's midsection.

It was almost chilling, how fast it was over. A single, overwhelming

burst of blue fire, and the agent's scream was cut off so quickly it seemed unreal. It made Hana wince to look at, and she pressed her eyes shut as she weakly but stubbornly untangled herself from Keigo, hands scraping on the ground as she tried to locate where Tenko's voice had come from. Dabi let his flames die down, thankfully, because the heat was almost overwhelming in and of itself; she could hear Keigo coughing somewhere behind her. There was nothing but ashes left of the agent, perhaps the most disturbing part. The flames had even, somehow, put out the fires from the agent's flamethrower in its path, or simply overtaken them, but everything left burning was blue.

Hana reached up and gently held her head. She could feel blood, even if it wasn't aching badly right now. Shock. But she didn't want to flutter and pass out. She didn't want to lie down and wait for someone with a bandage. She wanted her *brother*.

But even still, she thought the shame might eat her alive.

Finally, she spotted him standing several paces away, stock still. He was staring at her like one might stare at a ghost. Even the red of his eyes- god, she felt stupid, they had the *same color eyes*- she could barely see, for how wide his pupils were. Voice weak, she rasped out, "Tenko?"

His eyes widened even more. He took a step towards her, then another, then ran the rest of the way and skidded to a stop on his knees, seizing her arms with still-carefully raised pinkies. "It's you," he breathed out, with manic she recognized from her own panic episodes from when she was younger. "It's you, it's you, it's *you*-! Where did you go! Where did you *go!*"

He repeated it when she said nothing. Tears spilling from her eyes, Hana let out a painfully pathetic whine before she answered. "I ran away," she sobbed. "You reached out for my hand, but- but for some reason- you let go. And I was so scared, I just- I *ran*. They told me...you were dead. I didn't- I didn't know." Heaving breaths escaped her as she cried, ducking her head and doing her best to lean away from him, but he just kept pulling her back. "*You should hate me!"* she yelled, not even caring that she could feel the presence of others coming into the alley now. "You should- you should *hate* me. It was my fault, Tenko, don't you *realize?* It was my fault! All of it! I was such a- such a fucking coward-" She hiccuped but didn't stop, barely giving herself room to breathe. "I was too afraid of Father to tell him the truth, and he took it out on you. He always did! When everything fell

apart- it was *all my fault-"*

"No it wasn't!" Tenko shouted back at her, looking like he was stubbornly refusing a shine in his own eyes. "No it wasn't, you were a fucking kid-"

"I was your big sister! I was supposed to *protect* you! But I failed, I'm a *fucking failure*-"

"*It was his fault, not yours!* Everything was his fucking fault! All that bastard *did* was hurt you, of course you were *fucking scared* of him!"

"I should have taken care of you. Not- not-"

"It doesn't *matter now*!" Tenko howled.

Keigo felt his chest ache as he stared at them. Dabi was staring into the darkness, oddly tense, and he was still kneeling on the ground, waiting for the ache in his limbs to die down. Across from them, he could see Kurogiri and Compress staring at the siblings, both looking poignantly sad- even Kurogiri, with his lack of expressions. Compress' brow furrowed as he took a step forward, looking like he wanted to help, but Kurogiri stopped him with a hand on his shoulder.

"It doesn't matter now," Shigaraki repeated, breathing heavily as he finally drug Hana into a hug. It wasn't so much a hug as it was the two clinging to each other. "It doesn't matter, because you're here, you're right here, and I found you again. I've got you now. And he won't, he won't hurt us again, he'll *never* hurt us again, I turned him to *dust. I'm* the one who should've taken care of *you*, and I will now, and nothing will ever separate us again. Nothing. Nothing. *Nothing*." His hands looked like they were shaking as he started stroking her hair, with an unpracticed but desperate air. His expression darkened into something downright terrifying. "I'll make sure of it."

Hana forced herself to stop crying, but let out one last shaky, uneven sob as she slumped into his shoulder.

Keigo's eyes caught movement near another entryway leading to a different street. He turned, and to his surprise, found Aizawa standing at the mouth of the entry, staring grimly at Shigaraki and Hana. God, had the man seen them on television and seriously come all this way just to-?

Aizawa met his gaze across the alley. His goggles were pulled down around his neck. He eyed the two siblings one more time before he

started heading towards him, keeping to the edge near the buildings.

Keigo got to his feet. Now that the adrenaline was dying down, he was starting to feel the punishment from having to throw himself around so much. Not to mention the shooting pains in his back. He winced, making Aizawa frown as he came near. "Injuries?" he asked, quietly, *softly*, almost, making Keigo's feathers bristle in embarrassment.

"Nothing severe," he muttered, brushing some dust and ash from one of the sleeves of the leather jacket Hizashi had gotten him that looked suspiciously like Present Mic's, only more suited to walking around in everyday life. His wings probably looked god-awful, and he knew he was covered in patches of blood- some his, some not- but he didn't want a scene, well...*here*.

He glanced over at the others. Kurogiri had walked over to kneel beside Shigaraki, speaking to him in low tones, even if he seemed fairly unresponsive. If anyone could get an answer out of him, it was probably Kurogiri. He looked up at Aizawa then, seeming curious.

"Everyone, please gather a bit closer," he asked, voice even and calm as always. "I think it would be wise to leave this location as soon as possible. I will not warp us far, if that is all right."

Aizawa gave a short, crisp nod.

"Are they all dead?" Shigaraki asked, practically hissing, his scowl deepening when Spinner nodded. "*Good.*"

He was still holding his sister, who was half-unconscious but still holding on just to look cranky. Aizawa eyed her bandages as he finished off tying Keigo's. They all refused to see any medical professionals, which he'd expected, but he felt he had to try and convince them anyway.

"So," he began, folding his arms as he took a seat on a barstool. It was a random, abandoned bar they'd teleported into so he and Magne, as she learned she was called, could help the ones called Compress and Kurogiri apply bandages. Toga had one or two cuts, and Spinner had a small burn from an electricity gun; it was mostly Keigo and the woman who'd needed bandaging. He turned to look at the only other hero in the room with a raised eyebrow. "How exactly do you know them?"

"Huh?" Keigo jumped at being singled out, chirping nervously as Aizawa stared him down. "Uh...we met at a mixer...?"

Aizawa gave him a *Do you think I'm stupid?* look.

"The, uh..." His tongue felt like lead trying to say it, but he forced himself to just to get it over with. "The Commission had me try to infiltrate the League as a...mission."

He could *see* a vein start to bulge in Aizawa's forehead. "They thought sending an untrained twenty-two-year-old as a spy to what they thought to be a large villain organization was a good idea?"

"I'm trained!"

"In *espionage*?"

"...Technically, no."

Aizawa scowled at him. "Amazing," he droned, tone clipped, which made Keigo wince, though he knew it wasn't directed at him.

"Don't worry!" Toga piped up, still cradling Aizawa's knife like it was some kind of keepsake. "We're friends now!" Somewhere behind her, Dabi looked like he was massaging his forehead as he leaned against the wall with a hand over his eyes. He hadn't said much since they'd been there, still seemed oddly tense, but Keigo didn't exactly have a chance to ask about it.

"Right," Aizawa sighed, with an amazing amount of patience. "You aren't even villains."

"Yes we a-"

"The most illegal thing any of you have done so far is try and fail to attack a high school class under what I suspect to be heavily misguiding influence." Ah, that was interesting, how Compress seemed to go tense, eyes flitting to Shigaraki. "After that, seemingly nothing but attack random criminals. Vigilantes at most."

Toga closed her mouth with a pout.

Tomura himself scowled. It was more of a pout, too. "We're still v-" Aizawa looked over at him, and he nearly bit his tongue, choking as he stopped talking and awkwardly maneuvered into a glare directed at the floor.

He looked entirely uncomfortable. Keigo knew both he and Hana had a terrible habit of sitting in the worst ways in the worst places, but combined it was even worse. Normally, one of them might perch on top of the bar while the other tried to beat them in a Pokemon match whilst sitting across two barstools, neither of them looking up from their game systems; Shigaraki was sitting cross-legged on an old bar table, Hana curled up in his lap like a cat, sitting with her feet propped up on the back of a chair. A shorter chair was holding up the table in general, replacing a missing leg.

"Tonight, you *helped* two heroes," Aizawa continued dryly.

"On a technicality," Hana mumbled. She glared, just for the sake of it, when Aizawa looked at her, sticking her tongue out.

Compress tapped his walking stick against the floor a few times to catch their attention. "Well, regardless," he said, coughing into his fist. "I believe we owe you some thanks, Eraserhead, since it appears you've helped us...again." Beside him, Kurogiri was simply staring again, eerily quiet. "I do hope we can...keep things quiet."

Aizawa stared at him for a long moment before sighing. "The official report is going to say Hawks and I fought off the attackers before they escaped," he said, knowing the warper had done away with the bodies. Several of them visibly relaxed, and he spotted a small smile flit across Compress' face. "Just...*attempt* to stay clear of trouble." God, he felt like he was trying to reason with his kids. The keyword being "trying."

"Very well. Thank you for your discretion."

Aizawa turned to look at Keigo. He realized after a few seconds, startling, and tried not to look too obvious as he felt himself turning pink. "What?"

"We're going home."

"You two live together?" Spinner asked, sounding confused.

"Oh, that's right!" Compress exclaimed, sounding giddy as he smiled. It was a traitorous smile. "You did say you had adopted a bird, Eraserhead."

"He's your dad?" Spinner squawked, loudly, which made Keigo groan and bury his face in his hands.

"Mr. C!"

Where Do You Belong? (p3)

Chapter Notes

> you: doesn't the ch 292 leaks ruin ur dabi interpretation though? : (
> me: not if you've seen it coming the whole time
> (srsly tho if you want to see me rant abt dabi for an embarrassingly long amount just search dabi on my tumblr lmao)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"I am not putting fish skin on my face," Hana had told Spinner, a twitch in her eyebrow.

"It'll help!" he'd insisted, waving tilapia skins at her. "I'm serious! I read about it in a magazine. Some doctors in burn units use them to regrow skin! You don't wanna end up looking like Dabi, do you?"

"That's so offensive."

"Just try it!"

So now there she was, with most of her arm, part of her neck and part of her face wrapped in fish skins under gauze. Fortunately, she could move her hand better now that she wasn't in shock, but she was still probably going to scar pretty badly. Unless Spinner's *fish skin idea* of all things turned out well.

A shuffling noise caught her attention. Opening her eyes, she gave what passed for the League's living room a scan. She was sprawled out on the couch, with a pack of ice wrapped in a towel Toga had given her, but she could see white hair out of the corner of her eye. "Tenko?"

She heard him shuffle closer. He was rubbing at his neck, but not scratching, eyes darting around to everything but her eyes. "Do you...need anything?" he muttered, nearly making her snort. Her brother had never been shy to say what he was thinking, and it was a little bit funny, seeing him so awkward.

"I don't think so," she murmured back. She closed her eyes again, not really meaning to try and sleep, only to see if her mind would be quieter. She frowned.

It was probably too lucky to expect her nightmares to leave just

because Tenko was alive.

"What's the matter?"

"Can't sleep," she mumbled, reaching up and carding her hand through her hair. "Every time I close my eyes, all I see is...that shitty night."

For a moment, he said nothing. She heard him moving quietly across the floor to sit in front of the sofa, curling up against it, beside her head. "It doesn't matter," he finally muttered, his voice vaguely uneasy. "It's...it's over. You're here. That stuff doesn't matter anymore."

Hana bit her lip as it curled. She wished her brain would believe it that easily. She wondered if he even did. "You don't hate me?" she asked, wanting to be sure. *Promise?*

"I would've said if I did," he grumbled in return, making her smile. "...you don't hate me, do you?"

"I never hated you."

"...all right."

Keigo spent the better part of an hour cleaning himself up in the bathroom without directly taking a shower. Now that there was no adrenaline pumping through his veins, every little ache felt amplified. His back felt too tender and sore to stand under the hot water, so he gave himself a sponge bath and gingerly combed through the feathers he had left as best he could. Everything felt a little bit too bright, a little bit too loud, and it had all evening, really, he just hadn't noticed until now it had left him a hammering headache. He sat on the floor, leaning over the edge of the bathtub, grimacing as he hoped he didn't vomit. He'd *really* had enough of throwing up lately.

He heard the door click open. He was expecting Yamada- Hizashi? It felt weird calling them by their first names, even in their home- but, instead, Aizawa stepped into the bathroom. Keigo got a good look at his shoes, squinting, as the man walked over and knelt down beside him; he didn't say anything as he reached over and started to help him get his wing through one of the long slits in his pajama shirt back. He'd only gotten it half on before deciding the cool ceramic of the tub felt great on his headache.

Some of the embarrassment from the League calling Eraser his *dad* still hung about in his head. Keigo really had no idea what

having a dad was supposed to be like- he didn't remember whoever his father was, he barely remembered his mother, and he certainly had no parental figures in the Commission growing up. He tried to mumble a thank you, but he was so tired it came out unintelligible.

"It looks like you overused your Quirk. I'm not surprised, considering you didn't have multiple sets of eyelids this morning," Aizawa told him dryly. "Do you know what caused a spontaneous growth?"

"Uh..." Trying to ignore how the tips of his ears had turned red, Keigo resolutely stared at his shirt as he buttoned it. "Adrenaline?"

"You care about them, don't you?" Keigo jumped at being called out so easily, grimacing in preparation only to look up and find that Aizawa looked...unsurprised. "Just be sure you don't get caught."

He sat there for a minute looking confused. That was the last response he'd expected- wait. Had Aizawa met the League before? Was that why he'd arrived with Toga and Spinner?

He was *still* confused when Aizawa helped him up off the floor and started towards the living room. Even though he had his own, high-tech secure apartment a few doors down, Keigo still ended up on their sofa half the time because of the chill that came down his spine when he imagined how many Commission operatives may be assigned to killing him. They were barely around the corner when he spotted a familiar face peering into the window with an excited expression.

"Hey, Hawksy!" Toga yelled, waving both hands back and forth. She was perched on the windowsill like a bird, clutching a knife in her hand, which was more than a little concerning since it looked like she must have scaled the building wall.

"Toga?" he sputtered, even as Aizawa subtly darted over to the window to pull it open. He took ahold of Toga's arm and pulled her inside while she continued to beam at them. "What are you-"

"You looked really terrible, so I wanted to check on you. And I know where you live now since you live with Mr. Eraserhead!" *Mr. Eraserhead?* "Look, he gave me his knife!"

Aizawa reached over and slid said knife into a sheath he'd seemingly pulled from thin air. "A knife that's very sharp, and could easily kill you if you fall on it while you're climbing around on a building." If anything, Toga just smiled brighter.

"Wow...that's...uh...cool..." Keigo really felt like he was missing something. A furrow pinched his brow as he looked to Aizawa for answers, but the man just pulled the window shut and then headed for the hallway. *Uhh, okay.*

He grunted when Toga slammed into him. She hugged him gingerly around the waist, avoiding the base of his wings, and hummed. "You were so cool on TV protecting Hana-chan- does the sparkly stuff stay? It stays, right? It's so pretty! I brought my brush so I can brush out your feathers. Can I? Can I?"

"Sure." He patted her on the head and stepped towards the couch, wanting to sit down. "And yes, the sparkly stuff stays."

"It makes you look like a vampire," Hitoshi's dry voice commented from behind him, making him jump. The little bastard came up from behind the couch, grinning, and Keigo gave him a lackluster glare. "Do you shimmer in the sun, Edward~?"

The English name sounded just a bit awkward rolling off his tongue. Keigo glared at him again as he settled down, while Toga just gave the other boy a curious stare. "That series wasn't even real."

"Yes it was, Midnight told us there's two copies of the second book they unearthed in Arkansas."

"Why were you even- you know what, never mind. This is Toga. Toga, this is Hitoshi-"

"I'm his little brother," Hitoshi said, with another assholish grin, as he lifted his hands and settled something on the sofa back. He had a pair of needles in one hand; he'd, for some reason, taken up knitting, as evidenced by the bright orange sweater Yamada had started to wear that looked like one of the cats had gotten ahold of it a few times. "Here, this is for you."

"For me?" Toga repeated excitedly, lighting up as he handed whatever monstrosity he'd created this time to her. It was a bright pink scarf, uneven and with yarn sticking out of it every few inches, but she didn't seem to notice anything wrong with it. "I love pink!"

"Well, I wasn't going to assume you did, but it was the only color in the clearance bin, so..." Keigo twitched. What kind of teenager spent their allowance on yarn in the clearance bin? "You're basically our sister now, so I thought I'd make something for you."

What, Keigo's brain went, again, while Toga looked up to stare at Hitoshi with a perturbed yet almost awed look on her face.

"Your sis? Really?"

Out of nowhere, Hitoshi pulled out an entire boardgame- had he been keeping that under the couch?- and tipped himself over the back, rolling unceremoniously forward to set it on the coffee table. Keigo really wanted to ask if he was trying to force adopt a teenage criminal in under an hour but said nothing as Toga started to jump up and down, because she apparently played the game with Twice fairly often.

What the hell, indeed.

At some point, Toga's eyes had become so heavy that she forgot what she was doing. She had been so excited to come see Hawks in person, and then it turned out he had a little brother, too, and even he liked her- he asked what her Quirk was and called it *cool* and mentioned how people had always treated him like a villain just because of his Quirk, too, and how she should come around more so they could play more games. Eraserhead came back in at some point, and Hitoshi gave him a creepy grin and told him he was 'helping him out.' Helping with what, Toga didn't know, but after she showed him Hawks' favorite way to have his feathers brushed, they kept playing their game until Hawks himself started to snore softly on the couch. Every so often, Eraserhead peered in at them again, and Toga completely forgot about going back to the hideout.

She felt...like she wasn't the odd piece of the puzzle that was too weirdly shaped to fit in anywhere on the board, for once.

When she woke up, the room was dark. She could hear the clock on the wall ticking even if she couldn't see it well enough to read it. Hawks was no longer snoring, but making a sort of light grumbling noise she heard sleeping birds make whenever there was a rare nest outside her window. He had shifted one wing in his sleep to rest over her body, even though it wasn't large enough to reach all the way, and Hitoshi had passed out on the loveseat.

Her stomach rumbled. She hadn't had much to eat, since she'd been so worried about finding Hana and had spent the whole time since she'd run off trying to get into her computers and phones. Then they'd run off *after* Hana, and she hadn't eaten anything when they returned to the hideout, wanting to make Hana-chan comfortable and then

wanting to visit Hawks. But Hitoshi had said they had things in their fridge she could have- Eraserhead wasn't awake to ask, but she was sure he wouldn't mind.

She wiggled out from under the wing and rolled onto the floor. She'd taken her shoes off at some point, and padded across the floor into the kitchen in her socks, opening the fridge and looking for something easy to eat. There were fruits and vegetables on the shelves, along with what looked like juice pouches; those reminded her much more of her blood pouches, so she snatched one up and closed the door, looking for a straw to stick into it.

There was a glass container of them right there on the counter. Happy, she grabbed one and pushed it into the pouch, taking a sip and smiling to herself. It wasn't blood, but it was the next best thing, and she was so lucky they happened to be in Eraserhead's fridge. *Cherry flavor!*

The handle to the front door clicked. Someone had inserted a key and turned it. She froze, having already turned to go back to the living room, and stood there as it swung open. *Mr. Eraserhead didn't leave, did he?*

A hand wearing a silver band snaked out and found the light switch. The overhead light came flickering on, making her jump.

A man with long blond hair stood in the doorway. He looked surprised to see her, pausing where he stood. His eyes flickered to the juice packet in her hand. "Oh. Hello there. Who are you, sweetheart?"

Toga went entirely still. She had no idea if she should tell him, or just run away and go back to the hideout. Did he know Eraserhead? Would it be bad to admit who she was? But if he had a key, surely Eraserhead didn't care if he came in...or had he just forgot?

The man's expression became mildly concerned. "Hey, it's okay," he said, holding up his hand to show there was nothing in it. His other held a heavy-looking bag with a loud design on it. "Is something the matter?" Why on earth was he asking her that?

The sound of Eraserhead emerging from the hallway caught her attention. He shuffled into the kitchen, squinting with a hand over his eyes, looking like he was still half-asleep or perhaps had crawled out of his coffin to walk around. "Himiko?" he rumbled, searching her out, before his eyes fell on the blond man and his face relaxed. Something about him seemed to become more awake. "Toga, it's fine. This is my

husband."

"Husban'?" Toga asked, her straw still in her mouth, blinking as Eraserhead walked over to the other man and greeted him with a short kiss. Her eyes went a bit round. *I didn't know Mr. Eraserhead was married!*

"Nice to meet you. My name is Yamada Hizashi," the man told her with a smile, setting his bag on the countertop. "Shouta told me about you. Don't worry, I can keep a secret." He gave her a wink, his red eyes reminding her of Tomura and Hana.

She relaxed, just a little bit. To her fascination, Yamada glanced at Eraserhead, giving him an almost chastising look, like how Mr. Compress looked when he criticized Tomura for not eating for eight hours at a time. "Shou, have you gotten any rest at all?"

"Couldn't sleep," Eraserhead mumbled, rubbing his eyes, and for some reason Yamada sighed.

"Come on. Let's get to bed. Hey, miss- may I call you Himiko? You'll stay until the morning, won't you? I'd love to actually talk to you, when Shou isn't falling asleep standing up-" Eraserhead gave him a mild glare, but he seemed unfazed, smiling mildly. "-Or in danger of passing out. Besides, it's more dangerous to travel at night, so I'd rather you stay here."

Toga thought for a moment before nodding. Yamada cast her a grateful smile. She returned to the darkened living room, where neither Keigo nor Hitoshi had stirred in the slightest, and settled back onto the couch, peering over the back at them. Eraserhead sighed, sounding exhausted, before resting his head on the other man's collarbone, mumbling something indiscernible. Yamada smiled and patted him on the head before starting to lead him towards the hallway where she assumed their room was.

He hit the lights on the way, leaving her enshrouded in darkness again. Toga settled down, gently pulling Hawks' wing back over her as if it was a blanket.

Mr. Eraserhead's husband even likes me, she thought, more introspective. She wondered if she should get up and leave even though she'd said she would stay. They seemed like an actual, proper family, but being around them almost felt like it did when she was with the League. Part of her *really wanted* to stay.

She reached down to the floor and found the sheathed knife she'd set down, pulling it up to her chest and curling up to sleep.

That night he stood in front of his bathroom mirror for what felt like the longest time. He'd slunk into his house like a burglar, making sure he didn't wake anyone up, almost wishing he didn't have to face his family when the sun came up. No- part of him wished he could sink back into the darkness and disappear like he used to.

Dabi gritted his teeth, gripping the sides of his sink so hard his knuckles turned white as he stared at his reflection. Seeing Shigaraki and his own presumed-to-be-dead older sister- it reminded him too much of himself. Fuck it all, he had never guessed that Shigaraki- had come from somewhere that was just as shitty as his own family, if not worse, in ways. Sure, Tomura was fucked up, but they all were. But what had transpired that prompted him to kill his father? How bad had it been?

He had gotten angry- hearing someone scream, the way Armament had, seeing people being burned in front of him- and his mind went white as he'd opened his palm and cremated the flamethrower-user. But it was about more than just Hana and Hawks and that night. He saw himself as he cremated someone for the first time, he saw himself as he burned people in his way, he heard his own wretched sobbing in his head from when he was seven years old and wondering why he was alive. He saw nothing but fire and felt it start to creep at his skin as he burned.

Nights like these were the worst. Because he thought about everything, all of it, despite his telling himself hundreds of times over the years he felt nothing anymore. The cold numbness deep down- the empty, maniacal grin on his own face in his nightmares as he laughed and his father burned- the way he set everything in front of him alive with flame, not caring what happened to himself or anyone else. He'd always denied he cared about the League or anyone in it- it was, after all, just a tool to his own goals- he'd even denied he cared about his siblings. But now, now that he was here- of his own volition, something he'd done almost wondering why he was doing it simultaneously- it was so much harder to deny it, and he felt even worse when it came to this. Sitting alone at night, wanting to tear out the metal in his skin until it was all raw.

He wasn't *fine*. He wasn't *good*. He'd lost control and gone out and burned the night he learned about what that stupid bird had gone

through, too, because it was always the fucking same. Children who were mowed down by the ambitions of those around them. And he'd started to care, despite everything; he'd started to care again, and he was angry at everything.

"Touya?" his mother's soft voice floated through the door, making him heave out a harsh breath. He didn't want to face his mother. "Can I come in?"

He said nothing. The door slowly creaked open, and Rei peered inside with a concerned look on her face. Except she didn't appear surprised to find him with his disguise off, fresh black dye in his hair. She took a step closer to him, wringing her hands together, and he couldn't look her in the face. She looked like she knew exactly what he was thinking, and he hated it.

"Touya...sweetheart...please talk to me. Please," she whispered. "Keeping it all bottled up will make it worse."

"I don't think you want to know about some things, Ma," he mumbled. He reached up and raked his palm across his face, barely flinching at the drag of his staples as he sighed.

"Touya-" God, sometimes that name stung; sometimes he wondered just how he'd done this to himself, undone all the work he'd put in to disappear. "Come here."

She carefully took ahold of his hand and pulled him back out into his bedroom. She sat down on his still-made bed, and he slumped down, sighing again as he leaned against his hand.

"It's hard, Mom." His voice cracked, though he wouldn't admit it, and he wasn't even completely sure why he was talking. Maybe it was because he'd never quite been able to lie to his mother, no matter how terrible he felt. When it had been bad- when she'd been growing more distant, every day, worrying over Shouto and how Endeavor was training him- he'd made himself go to Natsuo instead of her, because he knew he would let it all tumble out, and back then he hadn't wanted to put even more on her shoulders. "I fucking hate myself sometimes, you know that?"

She said nothing. They sat there in silence for a minute, her hand stroking the back of his.

"I wasn't supposed to be here. I was supposed to take care of him for good, and-" He closed his eyes, rubbing his forehead. "It's not like I

fucking expected to live through it."

He hated his father. *Hated him* with everything he had, and every night he thought about when the bastard had shown up to the house, and he'd *frozen*, and how much he hated himself for it.

He wondered if he'd changed. Become weaker. After so long spent denying that *weak* was what he was- he wondered if it wouldn't have been better to never speak to his brother and suicide-kill Endeavor like he'd wanted deep down. Because that was when something had changed- when he spoke to Shouto. When he'd surprised him in the street by catching his meds, he hadn't expected to feel anything for the kid, the golden child that Touya had been tossed aside for.

"I was different, a few months ago," he muttered, wanting to add on *I still am.* "Do you know...do you know I hated Shouto once, Mom? Did you know that?"

A tiny part of him wasn't ashamed to admit it, but ashamed to say it to her face.

"I thought about hurting him. Getting rid of him. I hated my own existence, I didn't even know why I was alive- what was the point, if *he* was going to pour all his fucking attention into someone else? It hurt every fucking day. But then...I met him, and...something...was different." He pressed his fingers into his eyes, thinking of that day several months ago. That day, for whatever reason, he hadn't been able to see an arrogant son of Endeavor who had everything handed to him anymore. Something about seeing Shouto kneeling on the sidewalk feeding a cat made him seem so- *childlike.* And it wasn't as if Dabi felt bad for every hard-up kid, but when he'd seen Shouto that day, he'd felt like he was looking at Natsuo instead.

He hadn't wanted to care. He hadn't wanted to hear about Shouto's woes. But something had made him follow him, hear about his fucked-up life, and there was a cold reality in hearing his friends convince him to go to a teacher about his abuse. It was like someone had stepped in front of him to slap it into him that Shouto hadn't asked for anything he'd received.

"The only thing inside me was hate, for the longest time," he bit out, voice tired and bitter. "And I think there still is. But- when I came back for Shouto-" And Natsuo and Fuyumi, even though they were grown now. He didn't even know fully what had spurred him on. Or maybe he did, but he didn't want to admit.

Didn't want to admit that part of him wanted to live now.

Didn't want to admit that part of him wanted *more*. To have things. To have more than Endeavor's end, that would also be his own.

That day- the day he'd met Shouto again- he'd gone out and tried to get it out of his head. Walking down the street he'd looked into a shop window and in the reflection of the glass he could have sworn he saw his sister's face. Not her as a child, but as an adult, staring right at him, but when he looked again nothing had been there.

He'd decided to change things, for whatever reasons. To take his siblings back, and maybe part of his motivation had been to take everything Endeavor had away from him, but now that they were together again Dabi felt too much like the weak little child who'd cried into Natsuo's shoulder.

"I didn't feel like I hated him anymore. You know- at one point-" Maybe even still now, in his worst moments, when he felt numb to the world. "I didn't care what it took to end him. No matter who in the world got hurt, whether I knew them or not." Maybe it had started with the League. A seed had planted itself inside him, small, but still there, to care about other people. In another world, maybe he would've been able to ignore it. Maybe he would've already been too far gone. "Whether I cared or not. I think...I think somewhere I went insane." He glanced down at his hands, at his scars, and let out a dry laugh. "How could I not?"

Rei gently laid her hands over his. He looked up at her, not fully wanting to, and found sympathetic grey eyes boring into him. "Sweetheart, it's okay," she whispered, a type of grief on her face that not even he could understand. "You are not a monster. We've all...we've all handled what happened to us differently. You aren't the only one who's...done something you regret." Her mouth twisted. She looked particularly pained, in that moment, and something in Dabi's chest- a small part- it just ached. Not because of just what had happened, but because of the look in her eyes. Every minute he spent with his family now, it made him feel even more. "And I know that some of those feelings- they're hard to deal with. They feel terrible. But you aren't insane. You aren't a monster. You're my son, and I love you."

His eyes were dry. Cruelly, pitifully dry, as they would always be, but he clenched his teeth, something heavy in his throat as a dribble of blood slipped down his cheek. Rei's face twisted in pain, a pain he

couldn't express, and she gently wiped it away. "Touya- whatever you do in this life- it has to be for you. You have to make your life into what you want it to be. In the end, we are all only responsible for what we could control. And what we can control is how we go forward."

"I don't know if I know how to do that." Every inch closer someone became to him was another fear he would hurt them. Even the people he never would have expected, a part of him had started to...like. *Family. Friends. Love.* They were all things he had given up when he was a boy - how could he assume he could have them now? "It- fucking scares me. There's...things, I want to do. Feelings...people...I want to...feel. Experience." He thought of Keigo, who he'd burned for. He dragged in an uneven breath, not wanting to admit it even to himself. "I don't know how to deal with that. How do I deal with- Natsu and Fuyumi- knowing I didn't even care once?" He stared at the baseboard on the wall opposite him, feeling that numbness creep up on him again. "How do I deal with Shouto, when- when I wanted to *hurt* him once? When I hated him?" He had felt so awkward, when they first moved into this house together, unsure of what to say or do. He almost hadn't even expected it to work, crafting a fake new identity to take his father to fucking court. "When I thought shit with Dad was his fault?"

"Touya, you have to forgive yourself," his mother murmured to him, rubbing a calming circle into his shoulder. "You have to let go of the blame, first, because you were a *child*."

"I wasn't always a child."

"I know. But- but none of you...none of you would be this way if your father was different. If...*I* was different." She looked away when he frowned, knowing what he would say. "It would have been different, if I would've had the strength to leave. I know it may sound hypocritical...but I'm your mother. I'm a parent."

Despite what it looked like, the scarred skin on Dabi's body was not tender. It had grown rough and calloused over the years, scar tissue that had lost much sensation thickening and becoming more rough. He felt nothing when he scrubbed a hand over his face, wiping away any bit of blood. "I-"

He paused. Rei gave him a confused glance when he looked up, still frowning. "Did you hear something?"

She followed his gaze and mimicked his expression. She got up and walked over to his door, tilting it open; it had only been open a hair, but he could have sworn he heard some type of noise. "I don't see anything," she murmured, obviously not wanting to wake Shouto. Not a second after, however, she paused. "I'll- I'll check."

He shouldn't have needed to get up, but a sour feeling in his stomach made Dabi stand and go after her as she walked down the hall to Shouto's room. She reached for the handle and peeked inside, expression growing concerned when she spotted the empty bed. It was then Dabi heard the door downstairs clatter shut.

"Shit," he hissed to himself, thinking that *of course, this was just another way he'd fucked up, this was why he wasn't meant for this, meant for good things-* rushing past his mother and towards the stairs.
"Not *this* bullshit again."

If a HPSC murder-death squad was also conveniently after his brother currently, he really would just lose it and incinerate everything in his part of the city.

Not that he could really talk, considering he'd run away
from *his* problems for literal years.

"Touya-?"

"Just- just stay here," Dabi insisted, briefly pausing and looking back at her worried face. "I'll get him, okay? Just- stay here."

More fucking running. He swore to god his siblings were trying to kill him.

Well. Maybe not the greatest metaphor.

Shouto hadn't meant to eavesdrop. He'd woken up when he heard what sounded like voices, hushed and soft, and he'd gotten up only out of curiosity. He'd seen a sliver of light shining from Touya's door and had only meant to go ask what was the matter, not listen in, but then he'd heard him say- *when I didn't even care, when I wanted to hurt Shouto, when I hated him, when I thought things were his fault-* and something deep down inside him cracked.

He couldn't handle having ruined Touya's life too.

There was a park down the street from his house. It was a residential

area, quiet at night, and he sat curled up at the base of a tree, trying not to let himself cry. He couldn't help but be reminded of when Fumikage and Izuku had spoken to him- when they'd prompted him to change his life in the first place, and he found himself wishing they were there. Even the others from his class that he didn't know as well- they were all his friends, he'd come to realize, and anything would have been better than being alone. He would've taken being yelled at by Bakugou, even.

A soft rustling made him look up. He wasn't all that surprised to see Touya, but it made him feel even worse. He wondered if, maybe, if he hadn't been born, his brother would look like this. How much would it take to change someone's life? Could a single decision have made things better, or would he have had to not exist at all for Touya to be happy?

"Hey," his brother sighed, hands shoved into his pockets. His head dipped as he rubbed at the back of his neck. "How much you hear?"

Shouto didn't answer. He looked at the grass instead. He didn't move as Touya walked over to him, watching the black boots he wore when he went out at night, the long coat he wore rustling as he slowly settled down beside him, not too close and not too far. For a moment, neither of them said anything.

"...Sorry."

"Listen, kid, I'm- sorry. What?"

His small mutter somehow overshadowed Touya's awkward-sounding apology. The man looked down at him, looking half confused and half like he'd stolen his steam. "What?" he repeated.

"I'm sorry," Shouto muttered, wondering if there was a way he could fix it. Maybe he could...live with someone else. His sister, maybe. "I...you hated me, right?" Even though Touya had spoken in the past tense, he was sure those feelings were somehow still relevant, if he was talking about them. "I ruined your life. You shouldn't have had to come back for me. If you want- I can...leave."

Touya looked down at him, looking stunned. Shouto looked away.

"I- *no*," Touya practically spat, sounding a mixture of aghast and offended. "That's- those are fucked up things I thought when we were kids, Shouto. And- and maybe I felt that way for a long time. Maybe I'm still fucking learning how to deal with it. But it's not *actually what*

fucking happened. What happened was our old man was a piece of shit. Are you not even fucking angry?" At Shouto's silence, he grew angrier. "Are you not even a *little* bit angry to hear I blamed you and wanted to hurt you?"

Shouto sat there for a moment and opened his mouth. He shut it, however, without saying anything, because he couldn't find an answer.

"Goddammit, Shouto!" Touya turned to face him and reached down to grab his shirt, not roughly, but enough to make him startle and look up. "Get angry at me! Yell, scream, take a note out of that fucking classmate of yours' book and throw a fit! Anything, just-" *React.* Dabi realized, then, that this had been frustrating him for a while. He and Natsuo, they were the angry ones. And Shouto wasn't exactly a doormat- Dabi had heard about his little 'I won't use fire' rebellion that had lasted for years on end. But he and Fuyumi - they didn't *react* like Natsuo or he did. Dabi may have hated himself, but he hated Endeavor more. His sister and his youngest sibling shared a similar habit of internalizing shit instead of reacting to it, taking things, blaming themselves more than they should. "*Fucking get angry.*"

Shouto's face twisted into something pained. He still wasn't saying anything, but he looked so worn, Dabi didn't know what else he could do; what else he could say. He wasn't a fixer like Fuyumi or someone who could walk people through their pain like Natsuo. He dragged his brother closer, not knowing what else to do, hugging him so tightly he tried to twist away at first. "Just get angry for yourself."

Shouto heaved in a shaky breath. He was breathing heavily, shoulders quaking, and he finally cracked, a sob escaping him as he slumped into Dabi. He cried, quietly, in the way someone who had learned not to let anyone heard their crying would. "It's not fair," he whimpered, beating his fist weakly against Dabi's side. "It's not- it's not fair. It's not fair. It's not *fair!*" He shoved and pushed and hit, frustration boiling over and leaking out, sounding broken and hysterical.

Dabi held him tighter. "I know," he muttered, his voice hoarse and weighed down with grief. "I know."

Morning came, and Shouto opened his eyes to light flooding in his window, making him feel warm and as though what had transpired the night before had only been a bad dream. His mother made them breakfast that morning, a tired but genuine smile on her face, and

handed him a boxed lunch to take to school before he left.

Touya followed after him, a vaguely distant and awkward presence, with his ring on and his hands in his pockets; it was an apology of sorts, in a way. Neither of them said anything, but the silence was more or less comfortable, and Shouto didn't feel as bad as he had the night before.

When they reached Yuuei's gate, however, he did note with a frown that he could see All Might- in his smaller form, Shouto had been able to guess it was him by now even if he didn't know the specifics of his disguise, it was *so obvious*- walking alone instead of with Izuku. Was he still upset? What was bothering him so much? Was it something Shouto could freeze?

"Oh, hey!" an exuberant voice nearly screeched, making him pause. Coming from the opposite direction was none other than Aizawa-sensei and Yamada-sensei, and a familiar face Shouto hadn't figured he would ever see at Yuuei. "Da- I meeeeeean, Touya-chan!" Toga corrected herself with a beam, making Touya's eyebrow twitch.

"What," he said, sounding a little appalled. "Are you. *Doing* here?"

Toga grinned at them as Yamada came up behind her and set a hand on her shoulder. "I told Himiko I would show her what being a teacher is like," he explained, while Shouto silently returned the wave Toga gave him. "We were talking this morning and I mentioned when I had an education major shadow me for a day, and she said it sounded fun, so here we are! Sorry, I'm Yamada Hizashi. I'm Shouto's English teacher- I don't believe we've met."

"Yeah, we haven't," Dabi muttered. He would remember meeting someone with hair like that personally. "Todoroki Touya."

"Right! Touya." To his exasperation, the hero winked at him, and he gave Toga a scathing look. She smiled sheepishly back. Then Eraserhead walked up behind them, however, and to Dabi's utter shock, *still* didn't recognize him.

"Todoroki. You all right? You look paler than usual."

"I'm fine, sensei, I just got a bit less sleep than usual last night," Shouto said, like it was nothing, while Dabi twitched and squinted at them both. The change in his brother's countenance was so tiny he probably wouldn't have noticed if it hadn't been pointed out. Was Eraserhead snorting some kind of ultra-parent mode crack in his spare time?

"Rest in homeroom, if you need," Eraserhead continued, then, after giving Dabi a nod, he headed for the gates while his husband smiled secretively and giggled about something with Toga. As soon as the Underground hero crossed the school borders, he seemed to remember something, and his entire appearance darkened as he scowled and started marching towards the school. He practically radiated death, and even Dabi wouldn't have wanted to walk up to him and piss him off. The fuck?

"Is sensei all right?" Shouto asked.

"Oh, he's fine," Yamada replied with a sheepish-looking grin, starting to steer Toga towards their destination. "He's just going to...*deal with*...what made little Shimura listener so sad yesterday." Dabi took this to mean he was either going to commit a murder, or tear someone a new asshole. *Shimura. Huh. Sounds familiar.*

Shouto seemed to perk up at that.

"-I'M NOT LATE! I'M NOT LATE!"

Dabi looked up when a gust of wind brushed past them, making him stumble half a step. Something large and red stopped in midair, then doubled back, and Keigo dropped to the sidewalk beside Yamada with a vaguely embarrassed look on his face. "Oh, hey! I didn't realize you guys were here." He looked at Dabi, clearly only meaning him. "Walking the chick to school? That's nice."

Was he- was he wearing *glitter*? Somehow Dabi hadn't looked this closely the night before, and there were actual golden specks around the man's eyes. His eyelashes seemed longer, the markings around his eyes more pronounced. Gold was dusted across his feathers, fully regrown, and he looked like he'd made a full recovery just with a good night's rest. He wore a black button-up and a long, thin red tie that Dabi knew had come from Fuyumi.

He must be going for the teacher look.

Not that it looked bad on him.

He broke and smirked. "I'll do it everyday if you arrive like that everyday, birdie."

Predictably, Keigo turned beet red as Yamada snickered at him. He muttered something unintelligible about having to get to class and whirled around to flee. There were definitely tiny golden feathers in

his hair.

Shouto elbowed him. Dabi glanced down and found his brother giving him a stare that just screamed *Seriously?* He shrugged and returned his hands to his pockets.

For a brief moment, he thought about what he'd agonized over the night before. Fuyumi thought he was teasing the bird just because he was an asshole. (And, well, he was.) But- really- he knew he thought he shouldn't get to have something like that.

But part of him wanted to live again, and part of him wanted people again. He looked up at the sky. A few small red feathers were still drifting in the air after their owner's hasty exit.

He supposed there was one shade of red he didn't hate.

Right now, though, he needed to get out of visual range of the hero brat school, because Toga was staring at him with the rabid enthusiasm of someone who was about to try and get him dragged along on her little see-the-school tour, and *fuck that.*

(He'd gone back to the hideout, the night before, soot on his fingertips and anguish in his veins, and found Shigaraki where he sat in the empty bar.

"Hey, Shigaraki," he'd said, something empty in his voice. "It feel good? When you killed your father?"

Shigaraki didn't look at him, he only stared at the bar top, grimacing at it for so long that Dabi thought he was either ignoring him or hadn't heard him. Eventually, though, when he was about to leave, he did answer, eyes far-away.

"No. It didn't."

He got up and left.

Dabi did, too.)

Chapter End Notes

> everyone is just going to go in a million circles with everyone else's identities lmfao

all kinds of people who need people

Chapter Summary

all might: it's my fault
nighteye: no it's my fault
all might: no me
nighteye: no me
all might: no me
aizawa: it's both your fault, PREPARE TO DIE

Chapter Notes

rip shinsou unintentionally bringing together two unstoppable objects

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The air in the staff lounge was positively stifling in how awkward it was.

The room was otherwise empty, save for the two men sitting across from each other on the sofas, *pointedly* so. Usually at least one teacher was in getting coffee around this time, merely half an hour before classes began. Toshinori just knew that someone had told them all to steer clear so he and Nighteye could talk. How they even knew was beyond him.

Across from him, Mirai coughed into his fist to clear his throat. They'd already been sitting there in silence for about five minutes, not looking at each other, and he had to admit it was kind of pathetic. They were grown adults with decades of experience on this earth between them; they could surely resolve their own conflicts in a mature way.

...other people had also apparently found out, somehow, because Mirio had practically shoved him into the room when he'd arrived after the boy called him there, then stood in the doorway with pursed lips and a determined frown while he said *You need to work it out with him, Sir,* and then yanked the door shut as he left.

"Toshinori," he began, resigning himself to the fact he would have to start. "I should...apologize for the other night. I wasn't thinking clearly."

Toshinori looked up at him and blinked owlishly. He grew mildly sheepish, then, looking embarrassed at the way finally meeting again after several years had gone on both their sides. "I should apologize, too," he said, tugging at his shirt collar. "I didn't help things by getting heated..."

"No, it was my fault. I am still...worried. Concerned. But I went about it in the wrong way-"

"Your intentions were not bad. You were- are- concerned for me. That's...always how you've been."

"I know my intentions. And I cannot apologize for them. But I crossed a line- I cannot think to tell you what to do- I wasn't *trying* to, but- it simply feels as though you have never *listened* to me, Toshinori. But I should not have let old frustrations affect how I spoke of things now."

Toshinori's eyes drifted to the tabletop between them. "You are not entirely wrong," he murmured. "I put you into a difficult situation, those years ago. I know it must have been difficult, seeing me destroy myself over and over." Mirai pressed his lips together, not wanting to acknowledge how true that was. "But...young Izuku is the best choice. I thought that long before I realized I thought of him as a son. I know- I believe- he can handle this."

"I...know. I did not mean to make it seem as though I was not interested in- meeting him, seeing his potential- knowing him. I was just...worried." A long sigh exited Mirai's body as he urged himself to just say what he *meant* before everything became derailed again. "When I saw that you had adopted him, all I could see was a chance for you to finally be happy after so many years of being alone- and you have been alone, Toshinori, don't argue that at least. I want you both to *be* happy, safe. I don't want this responsibility to take him from you."

Toshinori's expression both softened and became mildly downcast as he stared at his hands. A moment passed in silence before he began to smile, just a little bit. "I cannot fault you for that. But I...believe in him. If I were to ask you- Mirai- I know you have always been the one of us more fond of logic, of things you can control, but I'd ask you to believe in him as well. To believe in me, and believe we can twist that cruel fate that seems to follow the users of One For All wherever we go."

Mirai's heart twisted. "I suppose I can try, if nothing else," he said, a

small roaming onto his own face for the first time in their conversation. The tension in Toshinori's body eased up. And, he thought, that was all he really could do at this point; he couldn't change things, or force Toshinori to change his mind, and he'd learned after years of staying away that he may as well accept the alternative- of staying near the two- because isolating himself again wouldn't help.

"Well," he said, after they'd spent a minute simply relaxing at the new lake of tension, "I am already here. I suppose I should meet this boy that has you wrapped around his little finger."

Toshinori tried to ignore the flush heating his skin. "Mirai."

"You clearly spent three and a half seconds longer hugging him on television than the other students."

"Well-"

Mirai paused when he felt a sudden...heaviness to the air. Toshinori noticed it, too, because he stopped talking, looking confused for a brief moment before dread appeared on his face. Mirai suddenly found it a bit harder to breathe, and he let his eyes dart around, wondering what was the cause- was a villain somehow inside the school? Was something bad happening? Were they in danger?

"Toshinori, what is-"

"Oh no," Toshinori whispered, wan, making Mirai's brow furrow. "Something must have happened..."

"What?"

The feeling intensified, as if whatever was causing it was getting closer. Concerned, Mirai looked to the door.

Toshinori's voice was strained. "It's-"

The door slammed open. Mirai tried to keep himself from jumping, he really did, but nothing could have prepared him for what was waiting for them on the other side. At first, he wasn't sure if it was a person at all, because all he saw was a weird combination of white cloth and black hair floating in midair, and then glowing red eyes staring them down like they'd committed a crime.

Eraserhead, the rational part of his brain pointed out, but his body was frozen.

Eraserhead took one long step into the room. Toshinori cringed away from him as if he was more frightening than even All For One. Mirai didn't get the sense that the man was going to strike them or anything, he just felt...extremely apprehensive for reasons he couldn't understand.

"You two," Eraserhead seethed, pointing at them, and Mirai jerked back a little bit. "Sort your own shit out and don't let it affect my student."

"What?" Toshinori asked, weakly, because he had to ask, and Eraserhead glared at him. He shrunk down until he was practically the size of, well, someone who was a regular height.

"I'm guessing you don't *know*, Yagi-" Mirai had never heard someone say someone else's name both so familiarly and yet so scathingly. "But your argument, tiff, lover's spat, disagreement, *whatever* it was the other night, was *overheard* by the person you were *talking* about. Togata told me-" Well, there was a bit more information on how Mirio was involved in this mess, he supposed. "-That he was crying. Not just crying, *bawling*. Because he apparently thinks that *you*-" There, he looked at Mirai, and he suddenly understood why Toshinori was practically cowering. He felt so uncomfortable the window even looked like a viable method of escape. "Hate him somehow, and thinks he's done something wrong because he has never had a father before and one of his father's only friends now hates him, which to his mind obviously means he must have screwed something up. So you two, whether you want to or not, are going to sort out whatever the fuck you have to deal with and dispel this notion from his mind, *like adults*, and not let any further disagreements between *you* affect my Problem Child, who is a heavily traumatized fifteen-year-old boy who does not deserve one ounce of mistreatment from any adult in his life. Understand?"

They both nodded robotically. Eraserhead leaned closer, squinting, as if to make sure they really meant it, and he had yet to blink even once. "Good," he hissed.

Is this what terror is? Mirai wondered vaguely.

Eraserhead turned around and stormed out, using his capture weapon to slam the door behind him. Mirai stared. A long, shuddering sigh left the man across from him.

"Oh, my," he murmured, mostly to himself, as he wrung his hands

together. "I...I didn't realize Izuku overheard us...this must be why he avoided walking to school with me..."

"...who was that?"

Mirai knew what Pro Hero he was, but he had no idea how Eraserhead was involved in this *too*.

"Oh." Toshinori turned sheepish again, raking a hand through his hair. "That's Aizawa- Eraserhead. He's the homeroom teacher for Izuku's class. He is, as the rest of the staff would say, 'co-parenting' with me. He is simply...like that sometimes."

"I...see."

"He only has the children's wellbeing in mind, I assure you."

"I don't doubt that. What...did he mean by traumatized?"

Toshinori's expression became particularly depressed. It made a bad feeling settle in Mirai's gut. "Did you happen to hear about that school in the city that was shut down?"

"I believe so. There was something in the paper about their abuse of Quirkless and mutation type students-" Mirai stopped midway through his sentence. "Oh."

He felt even *worse*, now. Of course the boy would have taken whatever he'd overheard in the worst way possible if he was used to every adult he knew *meaning* what they said in the worst way possible. Learned patterns of behavior almost always trumped whatever excuses one made for something- and for good reason, because they had learned over time that the behavior would slither its way out even if others said something different.

"There is still time before homeroom begins, but even so, Aizawa won't mind if it runs over... Come, we should...make things right."

Izuku had a lot on his mind when he got to school. He'd woken up to a long, long rambling message from Hana explaining the events of the night before (because apparently she lost the ability to be concise when hopped up on pain meds), events the only fueled his anger-filled (and vaguely petty) vendetta against the Commission. He wasn't particularly *surprised* that Hana and Shigaraki were related, since, when he really thought about it, they were...oddly similar, but it was

a bit weird how they just so happened to find each other.

It really felt like there was some kind of connecting thread he was missing.

But, he didn't know what it was, so he couldn't devote too much attention to it, and he wryly stared down at her latest messages as he walked towards 1A's classroom.

Armament: p.s. we figured out what to call the league

Armament: tell him tenko

Ambition: i TOLD you not to use my name in front of anyone

Ambition: and it's the league of liberation.

Armament: aka

Armament: LOL

Arraignment: i hate both of you

He looked up, fully intent on finding Keigo to relentlessly tease about somehow accidentally joining the "LoL," but froze when he rounded the corner and came face-to-face with not only All Might but Nighteye *too*, aka both people he'd been avoiding (mentally, for Nighteye, but still).

Toshinori's expression shifted into one of surprise. "There you are!" he exclaimed, then, when Izuku started to go tense, he panicked preemptively and rushed towards him. "Wait! Hold on! Don't panic! And don't start crying! And don't run away also! I swear this is all a misunderstanding!"

"Wh- wh-"

"Everything is all right," Toshinori rambled, unintentionally doing exactly what he'd just told Izuku not to do as he started waving his hands around. "I know that conversation you heard must have sounded bad- I mean, terrible- but it wasn't as it seemed, I swear- Nighteye here does not hate you! Of course not! He was merely concerned- he doesn't want you to die, you see-"

"Huh?" Izuku felt his face twist up as he stared up at his father, a sudden stone dropping into his stomach. *Did Mom get some weird test result from my check-up last month?* "I'm dying?"

"Wha- NO!"

"*Toshinori,"* said Nighteye, as he rubbed his forehead with both hands. "Young man. You aren't dying."

"...w-wait, who told you about-"

"Aizawa," Toshinori said, looking embarrassed that he'd had to be told, and Izuku twitched.

"Who told *him*?!"

"...I don't know if someone actually told him or not. You know how he is..."

"I...guess...so...he...doesn't hate me?" Izuku tried to look at Nighteye himself, knowing it wasn't polite to simply refer to him while he was standing there, but couldn't quite meet his gaze.

At least he wasn't the only one feeling awkward. Adjusting his glasses, his eyes laser-focused on the wall, Nighteye stepped closer to them so he wouldn't quite obstruct the hall as much. "No. I do not think you are unworthy of...the legacy you've been given, either," he said, aware of the fact someone may still overhear. "What you heard was a...very inelegant attempt by myself to express my concern only over the fact you are his son, because that legacy is...a dangerous responsibility, and I did not want anything to happen to you that would cause Toshinori pain."

So...he was just worried about Dad? And him, technically, but that wasn't important. "Oh..." Now he just felt monumentally stupid, freaking out over nothing.

But that *did* mean...that All Might's old *partner* didn't hate him! The man who could see the future...that meant Izuku could ask him all the questions he'd had written out after all.

His notebook had already inched into his hands. "Does that mean I can...ask you about your Quirk?" he asked hopefully, making the man raise an eyebrow while Toshinori smiled knowingly.

"Yes, I suppose so."

1A happened to have English in first period that day, so Toga ended up on top of a giant pile of pillows watching as Izuku's usual group of

friends threw darts at a drawn-up board in a point-based trivia game to cram for a history exam. Near the front, Eraserhead and his husband were having a conversation while Aizawa stood with his hands in his pockets and Yamada leaned across the podium, and Hitoshi had dragged her over to where he usually sat without batting an eye.

"This is Himiko, nerds," he'd said, while sinking into the pile, "she's my big sis. Be nice."

That had gotten her a round of friendly greetings from the cute girls she recognized from Izuku's stories, Ochako and Tsuyu and Momo, and a very formal greeting from the one with blue hair and engines for legs, but he didn't seem bothered by her presence at all.

"Toga," said the voice of Shouto as he appeared out of thin air, looking unbothered by the presence of someone that for all he knew was a villain. "You like hugging people, right?"

"I love hugs!"

"Can I have a hug, then?"

Toga squealed and leaped on him. He almost tripped and fell, but there were plenty of pillows around anyway to break his fall, so Hitoshi wasn't even a little concerned. He wasn't surprised that Shouto knew her, either, because his brother was *obviously* the pyromaniac running around with staples in his face he'd seen on Aizawa's oh-so-secret *'who the fuck are the League*?' board in his closet, really, that was obvious.

He reached over with his foot and jammed it into the other boy's ankle. He grunted and went down, crashing into the pillows while Toga laughed, but he needed to relax more.

It was then Izuku came trotting into the room, looking positively elated, and one by one they all noticed and relaxed a little.
Even *Bakugou* seemed to lose some of the tension in his shoulders, as if the world was aligned correctly again. The greenette stopped short when he saw their study area, looking perturbed. "Toga?"

Completely unsurprising, Hitoshi repeated to himself.

"Izuku!" Toga shot up like a bullet, latching onto him like a koala, with a bright smile on her face. "It feels like I haven't seen you in forever!"

"I'm...pretty sure it's only been a few days? And why are you in *Yuuei?*"

"Oh, Mr. Eraserhead's husband Mr. Hizashi is taking me on a tour."

"...*what?*"

Hitoshi snickered. "She's my new sis," he said, again, smugly, just to watch Izuku's expression become even more befuddled.

"Good morning, Izuku!" Tenya said brightly from the one desk he was using to hold their books on. "You look in much brighter spirits! Is whatever was bothering you resolved...?"

"You were sad, Izu?"

"I- it was nothing, Toga. Um, I just kinda thought someone hated me, but it turns out he doesn't at all!"

"Who could hate you?" Toga's expression darkened. "I'll stab him for you."

Hitoshi thought *that* might garner a strange reaction, but instead, Ochako just leaned in with narrow eyes and made Izuku gulp. "Yeah, do we need to punch someone?"

"I'll help, kero," Tsuyu added, idly adjusting her jacket because of the sudden chill coming from Shouto's body. Even Tenya just looked grim, not bothering to try and rein in his classmates at all.

Toga looked vaguely elated that they'd all reacted like she had. Hitoshi supposed the egg was on *his* face for assuming she may not fit in when Izuku's friend group may as well be a mafia.

"Guys, it's fine!" Izuku insisted, turning bright red. "Like I said, he *doesn't* hate me, I just...misunderstood. Anyway, Toga-"

"Cuddle pile!" Toga interrupted him, taking him down with a tackle that left him wheezing. Shouto, however, was more than happy to play along, looking dangerously close to smiling as Toga wedged Izuku between them.

"Sooooo, 'toshi, are you gonna tell me more about your sister?"

Hitoshi let out a put-upon sigh and rolled his eyes. He didn't look *really* annoyed, though, at least not to Himiko, but he refused to

look at the blond boy bothering him on principle.

"Come on, 'toshi, introduce us," the boy said with a cheeky smile.

"Don't call me 'toshi," Hitoshi intoned, sounding vaguely dead inside as he set his lunch tray down at an empty able and sat down. Himiko folded her hands behind her back and kicked one foot back and forth, waiting, and the blond boy stood there with his arms crossed, so eventually he broke down and sighed again. "This is Monoma Neito. Ignore how annoying he is. This is Toga Himiko."

"A pleasure to meet you!" Neito burst out, sweeping his hand forward to shake her hand. Himiko blinked at it for a moment before taking it with some hesitation. "It's so lovely to meet more people from Hitoshi's family-"

"We go to school with three of them, asshole."

"-I'm sure he's told you all about school here and Class 1B."

"I haven't told her a thing."

"1B is just as impressive as 1A!" Neito went on, slightly unhinged. He somehow carried the kind of insanity-driven energy that made Himiko want to start giggling. "What's your Quirk?"

"Oh, I can turn into people if I swallow their blood!" Himiko chirped, and to her excitement, the boy looked like she'd given him a present.

"How useful! You could be excellent at infiltration! You and Hitoshi would make such a good team-" Hitoshi sighed, loudly, but Himiko got the feeling it was less because he was annoyed and more because they were ignoring him a bit. *Cute!* "Can I try out your Quirk some time?"

"Try it out?"

Some smugness appeared on Neito's face. "My Quirk is Copy," he explained. "If I touch someone, I can copy their Quirk for five minutes. Actually, we would all make a good infiltration team, don't you think?"

And that was how Hitoshi ended up sitting there, looking like he was suffering, while the two stared at each other with matching grins, except Neito looked exactly like Himiko and Himiko looked exactly like Neito. "This is the worst thing that's ever happened to me," he

said, staring at them as they looked at him with eerie, identical looks of completely crazed mania in their eyes.

"Come on, 'toshi, this is great," not-Himiko told him.

"Let's turn into 'toshi!"

"No! Keep that fucking needle away from me!"

Thus he ended up running down the hall, away from now truly identical sets of crazed giggling as Himiko let her Quirk disengage, swearing under his breath and hoping no hall monitors or teachers caught him. He got away with passing out in the halls, but running around with willy-nilly Quirk usage was a different story.

"'toooooshiiiiii," one of the Himikos called for him, fortunately in the distance as he finally lost them and slowed down as he rounded a corner. He stopped, breathing a little heavy, because he'd forgotten to breathe properly as he ran in his urgency to escape.

He straightened up and paused when his eyes fell on two vaguely familiar students that were stood at the water fountain in front of him staring. Staring at him, specifically. Not overtly, but out of the corners of their eyes, as if he was something distasteful, something to be weary of. If he remembered right, they were two of the male students from his original class in Gen Ed.

It wasn't uncommon, for other students who'd wanted to move up to hero courses too, to be bitter at those who got a chance, but they'd always erred on the side of the class that wasn't the most comfortable with his Quirk.

"You got something to say?" he asked with a frown, not keen on being stared at. The two glanced at each other before looking back at him.

"You could at least keep to yourself," the one on the right complained, a quiet mutter that wasn't entirely aimed at him. "We had to leave the cafeteria just to finish eating in peace."

A furrow developed in his brow. "What the fuck is that supposed to m-"

"Of course your sister's got some freakish Quirk too," the other one said, more heatedly, making the hair on Hitoshi's arms stand up as if he'd felt a chill. He curled his hands into fists, but said nothing. "Seriously? Drinking blood? That's fucking *gross*."

"It's not what a hero would do," the other one added under his breath. "But I guess she is *your* sister."

"What." He already knew; he'd heard it a hundred times before, he *knew* what they meant even as his stomach flipped and turned. "What do you mean by that."

The first boy gave him a look that was borderline pitying. "Your Quirk's *brainwashing,* dude. We all know that's something a villain would use."

His chest felt tight. Hitoshi had gotten so used to the atmosphere in 1A that he'd almost, *almost* forgotten what it was like to hear people say this shit to his face. *It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. I'm not a villain. I'm not-*

"I don't even know how you *got* into the hero course, with a Quirk like that-"

"Hey, guys!" Hitoshi went tense as a board when he felt an arm loop itself around his neck, able to feel Neito's forceful cheerfulness even without looking at him. The other boy's fingers subtly snaked up to his collar and found his collarbone, making him freeze. "What's up?"

The Gen Ed students diverted their eyes, speaking at the same time. "Noth-" "We were just-"

Hitoshi felt like someone had slapped him when their eyes went dull and they both stopped. They were blank, unmoving, just like when he brainwashed...

"Hey, we left some sludge in the hall from de-transforming," Neito continued, pointing his thumb at where he and Himiko had come from. "Why don't you two go clean that up?"

Like zombies, the two students shuffled away and around the corner. Hitoshi swallowed, hoping Monoma couldn't feel his out of control pulse. *Why do I feel so wound up? They aren't worth anything-*

"Don't listen to geeks like that," Neito told him, letting go of him and not noticing anything off about him. Swallowing thickly, Hitoshi unintentionally moved a hand to rub at his collarbone and stared at the wall. "What they have to say doesn't matter. They're just jealous of you and how hard you've worked."

Himiko twirled in front of him, looking half angry and half pouty.

"Those two were jerks! You're not even a real villain! You're a *good* hero. You help people and you're nice and you gave me all the blueberries from your trail mix. I'll stab them for you if you want-"

"I-I'm fine," Hitoshi stammered, interrupting her, feeling his skin flush as they both looked at him. "I, I mean, it's fine, I don't- I, uh-" Why the fuck was he so nervous? *What they have to say doesn't matter.* That idiot was so annoying all the time- but he'd sent them off like it wasn't even difficult. His neck felt too hot, and he wanted to unbutton his collar for air, but he was already fidgeting and he must have looked weird and- "I, uh, gotta go talk to my dad about something- Neito can you watch her-"

Monoma lit up at Hitoshi actually using his name, and he whirled around in a panic to flee, running off down the hall while Himiko stood on her toes to yell after him. "Do you want me to stab them? You didn't say-!"

Neito's voice floated after him just as he sped around the corner. "I think we can safely say he doesn't want any stabbings. He's a hero, after all!"

Hitoshi was absolutely *ruffled* when he finally found Aizawa.

"Hitoshi?" The man squinted at him from his desk in the staff room, looking perturbed. "Is something the matter?"

"*No,"* Hitoshi said emphatically, because nothing was wrong, he wasn't the friend that had *crises*, he was the friend that just spent all his time not getting any sleep and being a sarcastic asshole, "I just had a question! Nothing's wrong!"

A bead of sweat slid down his forehead as Aizawa raised an eyebrow at him. The only other people in the room were Midnight and Snipe, who just watched them like it was a rather entertaining tennis match.

"Okay," the man replied slowly. Granted, Hizashi probably would have been the better parent to ask about...things like this, but he was in class. *Not that Hitoshi was having a crisis or anything.* "What is it?"

"I, uh..." The room felt entirely too hot. He tugged at his collar again and tried to ignore it. "Wh-what does it mean if, uh, someone...touches you...in a weird spot...and it...embarrasses you?"

Fuck, he screamed to himself, because that hadn't come out right at

all, and now Aizawa was sitting ramrod straight and looking at him like he'd told him someone was attacking campus, *fuck!*

"Who the hell-"

"That came out wrong," Hitoshi nearly shrieked, wanting to crawl into a hole and never come out. "I didn't say that right- fuck- I mean- just forget I asked anything at all!"

He turned tail and ran away. Again. Hitoshi wasn't used to having to confront his problems head-on.

Fuck, Hitoshi thought, when he slowed down in the hall, heard one of Monoma's hysterical laughing fits, and realized his feet had turned to follow the sound out of habit.

Fuck, he thought, sweating, when the boy came into view- probably lauding something he was smug about to Himiko- and he realized that *that stupid idiot and his perfect smile* wasn't exactly an insulting thing to think.

Fuck, he thought, when Neito caught sight of him, loudly cheered that he'd come back, and hooked an arm around his neck, something he'd done a hundred times, and he realized he hadn't once shrugged him off unless he needed to leave or wanted to go find a corner to stand in.

FUCK, he thought, when Neito once again repeated that he shouldn't listen to anyone who tried to insult him, because he would *obviously* be a *great hero*, and a sensation he distinctly recognized as butterflies settled in his stomach.

Neito and Himiko fell into a laughing fit about something together, not realizing he was indeed having a crisis right between them. As Keigo would have said: fuck nuggets.

Chapter End Notes

plug for another class 1a as family fic I started (ง •̀_•́)ง
https://archiveofourown.org/works/28003980/chapters/68595441

wrong with me

Hitoshi would admit to being a bit of a coward. Okay, a pretty big coward, because he was currently hiding in the floor of a supply closet, which he made a habit of doing when he wanted to be alone, to the point he'd memorized the custodial staff's schedule to avoid them.

The door handle creaking made him groan. Unfortunately for him (or fortunately, for most everyone else) Hizashi paid more attention to his habits than he knew. He looked up and squinted at the light shining in.

Hizashi smiled down at him, then bent down so he wasn't looming over him. "Hello there, listener. Do you wanna tell me why Shouta's locked everyone in the staff room, broke off his spoon against a table to use as a shiv, and is basically threatening everyone at knife point because he thinks *someone's* got a rat in their class that upset you and he wants to look at the security cameras?"

Hitoshi groaned. He hadn't thought Aizawa would *flip his shit!* Had he finally broken? Snapped like a cheap two-by-four and gone off his rocker? Was he sleep deprived?

"I was trying to ask him something because you were in class but it came out wrong," he mumbled. Hizashi's smile became a bit gentler.

"Well, I'm here now! What'd you wanna ask?"

"...I was...*trying* to ask about...um..." Hitoshi looked away from his father's eyes and stared at the trim on the floor instead, feeling a cold sweat break out on his neck again. "Uh...a...student...a- a boy- touched me? And it was...embarrassing."

"Aww, you've got a crush?" Hizashi gushed, understanding instantly in a way his husband's currently sleep-deprived brain probably couldn't. "Who is it? Come on, tell me!"

"I- I don't want to tell anyone."

"Come ooooon. I'll make my cookies when we get home."

Hitoshi paused. Hizashi's cookies *were* the stuff of legends...honestly, it was the one thing he made that Satou couldn't beat. Meanwhile,

Shouta couldn't bake a single thing without burning it to a crisp somehow every time, even though he was a good enough cook. The allure was enough to make him mumble out an answer.
"It's...Monoma, I guess..."

Immediately, his father began to flat out *giggle*. Face going heated, Hitoshi looked up to glare at him, which only seemed to make him laugh harder. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry," he said, waving a hand back and forth but still grinning. "It's just, you really are like a mini-Shouta! Speaking of Shouta, though, why is he so mad? He was waving that spoon-shiv around, ranting about '*finding whatever sick little shit snuck into Yuuei like this...*'"

"...it didn't come out right when I asked him."

"Can you tell me *exactly* what you said?"

"...I said 'what does it mean when someone touches you in a weird spot and it embarrasses you.'"

A furrow formed in Hizashi's brow. "Ah," he said, in both understanding and a little bit of pity, "that would do it. And, what after that?"

"Nothing," Hitoshi admitted in shame. "I kinda ran out of the room."

"Yeeeah...I better go get that shiv away from him."

"Are you *sure*?" Aizawa hissed, practically spitting hot air as Hizashi did his best to maintain a calming smile, one hand raised in a placating gesture while the other held onto Aizawa's wrist holding the broken spoon. He didn't even know how his husband had managed to break it. "We don't need to watch security footage or question anyone?"

"I'm *sure,* Shou. Everything's *fiiiine*."

Slowly, Aizawa lowered his hand. Hizashi counted that as a win.

Snipe and Thirteen were standing awkwardly against the far wall, looking like they didn't know what to do with themselves. Midnight had retreated completely onto her desk, clutching a keyboard just in case she had to try and knock her dear friend out, while Ectoplasm stood by the windows looking as still as a statue. All Might was sat on the one sofa in the room, visibly sweating bullets, and Hizashi didn't

blame him, because as far as he knew the man had just gotten chewed out by Aizawa's apocalyptic rage that morning over *one* student crisis and probably had no idea what was going on. Keigo was there, too, seated in his chair with both of his hands up, like he was in the middle of a robbery. It was a little hilarious, if Hizashi was being honest. Only Midnight and Snipe looked like they had any idea what was going on, seeing as Aizawa had trapped everyone else in the middle of changing shifts as they dropped off materials at their desks.

"Nobody here would do anything like that, and I'm sure they're all watching classes carefully for any students in need. Come on, you trust our colleagues, right?"

"Of course I trust our colleagues," Shouta grumbled at him, like a surly cat. "But I'm also willing to kill them if they ever harm a student."

Hizashi was starting to doubt that his husband *wouldn't* cross the line of killing given the right circumstances, to be honest. "Which they would never do. Why don't you take a nap now?"

"I don't need a nap."

"That is *literally* the first time in my life I have ever heard you say that."

"Well, uh...this is good, isn't it?" Keigo spoke up, a bit hesitantly, trying to look cheerful when his newly adopted fathers glanced over at him. "The chick has his first crush, that's so cute!"

Hizashi smiled. "I'm sure you'll tease him about it," he agreed, then, unintentionally, walked right into another landmine. "But make sure to give him some honest advice too."

Keigo laughed, waving him off. "Not my department. I've never even dated anyone."

Aizawa, slowly, turned and gave a withering stare in Keigo's direction, as if slowly processing what he'd admitted. Keigo froze, realizing what he'd just said, and then slowly inched his chair behind Ectoplasm, pulling his wings in to try and hide behind his towering form.

The awkward silence was broken by Nemuri, stoking the fire with a wheedling grin as she shimmied off her desk. "Do you want me to set you up with a date, sweetheart? We can get you *loads* of experience with just one~"

Her self-preservation instincts saved her dented glasses or a sore eye by informing her to duck when Aizawa punted a file folder at her head. "Don't involve *any* of my children in anything lascivious, you R-rated nightmare."

Midnight giggled from behind the desk partition while Keigo groaned audibly from behind Ectoplasm.

Aizawa suddenly turned with a frown, eyes narrowing to slits, and Hizashi braced himself for another stress-inducing question. "Who was he talking about?"

"...you know, he didn't tell me."

"Hizashi. I *know* he would have told you."

"He kinda asked me not to tell?"

"*Hizashi."*

"I'm not gonna let you menace some poor unsuspecting kid."

"I wouldn't do anything *unprofessional.*"

"I know, but they'd still be able to feel it. Your menacing. All the way across school."

Himiko was actually feeling a little bit over the moon. She couldn't remember the last time she'd been *this* happy all in one day! Present Mic had gone to a gym to help in a battle simulation for Class 1A, so she got to see them all again (though, for some reason, Hitoshi did his best to stare blankly at the ceiling when Mr. Eraserhead came in). And they were practicing with *knives,* because Eraser apparently had *all* his students carry one with their costumes- and then she got special permission to *join in!*

"*DIE*," the loud blond boy she'd gotten paired up with screamed, grinning in a maniacal way, and no one seemed to think it was weird at all. She giggled, proceeding to do so for the entire time she tried to stab him directly in the face. They couldn't land a hit on each other, but he didn't seem bothered by her rather *real* way of trying to slice him, and they were still fighting by the time Eraserhead called for everyone to switch partners.

"Dammit," he groaned, like he'd gotten interrupted playing a fun video

game. "I didn't stab her yet!"

"That's not the point, listeners!" Yamada replied cheerfully from a small distance away where he was adjusting Ochako's grip on her knife. Himiko had decided that she *loved* Ochako. She was nice, and had a nice smile, and she was cute, and ready to stab anyone who upset Izuku. Just like Himiko! Tsuyu was the same, so blunt that she'd made Himiko laugh multiple times through the day. "And that's also why you're only using practice knives!"

The real thing would've been more fun, but Himiko supposed plastic would have to do.

No one seemed to be questioning why a random 'civilian' was joining on their exercise. They seemed satisfied enough with the fact she was Izuku's friend. Speaking of Izuku, he was drifting into her line of vision, searching for another partner, and she sprinted forward before pouncing on him with a grin. "Izuku, let me stab you!"

He smiled, not threatened in the least since she'd spent weeks trying to do just that and had never succeeded so far. "Sure."

It was all nice.

Really, really nice.

But, eventually, they all had to go to the locker rooms to change, and Himiko realized the sun was waning. It was late afternoon, which meant the day was almost over. Which meant she had to leave, and...well, she had obviously known she couldn't do this *every* day, but...it had been fun. It wasn't like she was some *hero schoolgirl,* but Izuku...his friends...they were different. They *liked* her. They accepted her. They weren't like heroes or everyone else in the world who hated Himiko just for being the way she was. It wasn't fun being at Yuuei; it was fun sitting between Shouto and Ochako and listening to Izuku and his friends discuss anything from games to the latest hero-villain fight in the city and how the hero could have done better. It was fun following Hitoshi and his Neito friend around and hearing Hitoshi call her his sis and meeting someone so much like her. It was nice...to pretend, for just a little while.

"Himiko, you home?" Yamada asked with a lighthearted tone, tapping her forehead. She looked away from the gate the class had gone through and up at his red eyes, the exact same shade as Tomura's and Hana's. "Can you follow me? We have one last stop today."

"Okay!"

She plastered on her biggest smile, and didn't say anything while she followed him. It was all nice. But nice things didn't last. It was why she only had the League, because nice things hadn't lasted for any of them either.

Nice things just didn't last.

She realized she didn't recognize the hall they were in when Yamada rapped his knuckles on a door ahead. He stepped inside without hearing an answer, and Himiko followed, feeling mildly confused when they entered an office that looked and felt very...official, yet somehow not that fancy.

Yamada put a hand on her arm and led her over to a sofa to sit down. When she turned, Himiko realized that there was someone on the one across from them, they were just too small to see from the other side. Eraserhead had come, too, and he was walking over to her other side.

"Hello there, Toga-chan! It's nice to meet you," the little creature said. "My name is Nedzu. I'm the principal of the school."

"...oooooohh," Himiko uttered, a little amazed the mouse was speaking to her. She resisted the urge to swing her feet back and forth, because for some reason he felt like a really serious person to talk to. Even though he didn't look serious at all. "Why are you talking to me?"

Nedzu chuckled and smiled at her, tilting his head and leaning forward to set down a teacup in his hands. He folded them in his lap, all proper-like. "Well, I have a proposal for you to consider! Let me ask you a question: did you enjoy being at Yuuei today? Being around your friends?"

Her *friends.* Himiko would love if they were her friends. Were they her friends?

"Yeah, I sure did!" she exclaimed, her smile not wavering.

There was a twinkle in Nedzu's eye. "You enjoyed being around Class 1A?"

"Yeah!"

"You enjoyed being around Shimura-san- I'm sorry, you know him as Izuku- and Hawks?"

"Yep!"

Nedzu's smile became a tad more gentle than...well, whatever it had been before. "Well," he said carefully. "How would you like to do that every day?"

For a moment, Himiko said nothing at all. Her smile slipped just a little. It was out of confusion, however, not sadness.

"...how would I do that?" she asked eventually, a sense of curiosity sparking in her. She couldn't comprehend any way she *could*, but he looked so sure of himself.

"Simple! By going to school here," Nedzu continued confidently, making her expression drop out of sheer surprise. "You see, I am aware of your...special circumstances. I am also not unaware that there are some things in your past that some may consider...unsavory. But I am a loyal believer of second chances, as well, and you have a unique opportunity, you see." He glanced down and pressed a button on the remote sitting on the cushion beside him. Himiko didn't know what it did, but after a brief pause, the windows tinted as the inside lights brightened to compensate. "I'll speak frankly, Toga-san. I know that you are a member of the 'League' operating under Shigaraki Tomura. I made the connection that the entity known as Armament is a part of this League a while ago. Am I correct?"

Mutely, Himiko nodded, not sure what else to do. She felt a little bit overwhelmed. *He knows Hana-chan?*

"You see, Armament and I formed something of a...friendly acquaintance. Neither one of us particularly trust the Hero Commission to do as it is supposed to," Nedzu continued serenely, pouring a bit more sugar into his tea and beginning to stir it. "Furthermore, neither one of us particularly trust the entity Shigaraki Tomura reports to. Do you know much about them?"

"Not really...? Shiggy doesn't let any of us stay in the hideout when he talks to that guy..."

Nedzu's eyes glinted just a little. "Well, you see Toga-san, the League of Villains and Shigaraki Tomura's League are two plainly different things. One is something that said entity created, and the other is more of a...vigilante presence. One that Yuuei is not opposed to working with to achieve our goals...I am sure you might have noticed we are not on especially friendly terms with the Commission right now." Himiko shook her head in agreement, wondering where he was

going with this. "So, the unique opportunity you have is to travel between our groups. You are young enough to maintain a presence here, and I am sure we can outfit you with appropriate gear for a disguise for your vigilante persona...do you understand what I mean?"

Himiko sat there and thought. Going between Yuuei and the League...was that something she could do? But...even if it had been fun, she didn't know if she wanted to sit in a classroom *all day*. It wasn't like school had been that hard, when she'd been doing it, but she'd gotten bored.

"I can see you have some reservations. I assure you that you wouldn't be bored. There would be academic requirements, of course, but what I had in mind was a more non-traditional approach. We've been looking into developing a program for students who don't quite require a traditional classroom setting, one that would better suit their needs. It would involve some online work, and sharing a studio space with another student we've picked for this by the name of Hatsume Mei, one of Izuku's friends, to give you a place to fulfill those academic requirements, but otherwise, you are not necessarily required to be on campus outside of weekly meetings with a faculty mentor to guide progress- but you are still welcome to sit in on a particular class, if you'd like. I imagine you have one in mind...?"

A slight thrill went through her. Himiko imagined being able to drop in on Izuku and his class whenever she wanted, not being chained to the school like a real student but welcome to come in...and if she had to do a little math or write something online, wouldn't it be a good trade? Izuku would definitely be willing to help her with anything she needed-

No, no. She was- what did Compress say? Putting the horse before the cart? Something like that. It sounded too...convenient. And going to a hero school- she wondered if that even made sense, in a cosmic sort of way. Was it even something she could do?

I CAN DO IT.

Nice things never lasted. Friends, Izuku, having fun, the class being nice to her...were they things she could have?

LET ME TRY.

"I have worked with Armament to erase the traces of those...unsavory things I mentioned. A stipulation would be, of course, that *further* incidents like those would require scrutiny."

I CAN BE GOOD.

A hand settled over one of hers. Hizashi was staring down at her, kindness in his smile. "I have a feeling, anyway, that most of those 'incidents' weren't quite...cut and dry. I know that you aren't a bad person. You aren't evil."

"Of course, you would need to assume your civilian identity again, but that is where Aizawa and Yamada come in."

The hand on hers tightened. "We'd...like to give you a home, if you'd let us," Yamada whispered, making something in her chest constrict and hurt. "I know I can't exactly stop you from doing what you're doing- no more than I could stop a certain somebody when we were teenagers-"

"Circumstantial evidence," Eraserhead muttered grumpily.

"-But I'd feel better if you were at least in a warm bed more nights than not. Shouta found your parents, he made sure they faced consequences. It wouldn't be out of the ordinary for the hero Eraserhead to track you after that. We could adopt you- make you Keigo and Hitoshi's sister-"

LET ME STAY

"You could...be our daughter. We can't make you- this is your choice- but I promise we wouldn't leave you, no matter what."

STAY WITH M-

Himiko kept on smiling, because that was what she always did, but her heart was fluttering in her chest like something had given it wings, and the mixture of fear and hopefulness running through her veins was almost making her feel numb. She didn't know what to say. She didn't know what she *wanted* to say. She didn't know if she could *have* this- she didn't *think* she could. *Can I have something like this? Can I have the League* **and** *Izuku and Hitoshi and everyone?*

"Hey, it's okay," Yamada said, a concerned expression on his face as he reached into his pocket and pulled out a handkerchief. Himiko's face felt wet. He put the cloth into her hand, and she stared down at it, not moving a muscle. "You don't have to decide right now. If you want to think about it-"

"My daddy said he hated me," Himiko interrupted, eyes feeling hazy as

she stared at the characters sewn sloppily into the fabric in her hand. It just said *handkerchief* on it. "He said I'm evil, and disgusting, and weird, and terrible, and everyone said he was right...everyone always thinks that way." Her smile quivered, even if she was still keeping it on. "You will too."

Eraserhead laid a hand on her shoulder. "You are not *any* of those things," he murmured, quietly, even though his voice still carried the same kind of authority it usually always did. "And neither one of us will ever say you are."

Oh, Toga thought, realizing what the sensation on her face was. She was crying. That was why he'd given her a handkerchief.

Nice things never lasted...but deep down she really, really wanted to believe that maybe, that wasn't true every time.

She wondered what she should do.

"I apologize in advance," Power Loader sighed, scratching the back of his neck as he walked down a hall about halfway between the cafeteria and 1A's classroom. He came to a stop at a door with a whiteboard nailed to it that, for some reason, read in bright pink marker *SUPER AWESOME STUDIO- DO NOT DISTURB!!! KNOCK FIRST!!! YOU MAY GET HIT WITH SOMETHING!*

He reached out and opened the door without knocking like the sign said. Lifting an arm like it was normal, he blocked a wrench coming his way and stepped inside. "Oi! Hatsume! HATSUME! Cut it out!"

A loud drilling filling the room came to an abrupt stop. The room was smaller than a normal classroom, but not cramped, cut in half by a long table running down the middle with a partition that stretched to the ceiling flanked by counters against each wall. On it, the floor, walls, and several wheeled racks were various tools and half-finished metal creations.

A blur of motion appeared from behind a plate of metal. A girl with bright pink hair cast them a maniacal grin, a drill in her hand, and some sort of insane-looking concoction with knives sticking out of it in her other. "Sorry, Power Loader. OH! Is this the other student in this room? Ohhh, sorry about the mess, I know you're only Gen Ed and I'm Support but I so didn't mean to take over the room-"

"This is Hatsume Mei," Power Loader said, a bit tiredly, and waved his

hand at them. "Knock yourselves out."

He turned and headed for the door. Himiko stood there for a moment, doubt swirling in her gut as she clutched onto the Yuuei jacket and ID card on a lanyard she'd been given.

"Nice to meet you," Hatsume chirped, throwing the knife-ball haphazardly and holding out her hand. "Are you Izuku's friend?"

The mention of Izuku spurred Himiko out of her temporary stupor. "Yes!" she half-shouted, grinning. *That's right. I am his friend!* "I'm Toga Himiko!"

"You can call me Mei! I think we'll get along just fine," Mei told her, a wild gleam in her eyes. "He told me you like knives. I have *so* many state-of-the-art new knife ideas you can try out for me...just don't tell the teachers that, heheh. Oh! Over here!"

She grabbed onto Himiko's arm, without fear, and dragged her over to the other side of the room. About half the table on that side was also overloaded with her projects, but she'd left the other half clear. At the end, there was a computer and keyboard set up, along with a bright pink chair with glittery tassels hanging off of it. A bulletin board hung on the wall over a small metal bookshelf Mei had obviously constructed and decorated with neon-colored stickers. There were twinkle lights stapled into the wall. "I figured the least I could do was make you a study area. I know you don't technically start school until next semester, but it always pays to get started early!"

Just then, one of Mei's 'projects' sitting on the far counter exploded, sending a sharp blade catapulting right by Himiko's face to embed itself in the wall.

"Aw, geez, sorry about that. I guess that one's a failure for now."

Himiko stood there for a few good moments before she started to giggle.

She *definitely* liked Mei too.

stupid with love

Chapter Summary

dabi: right in front of my salad???

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[2 am crush posting]

Hitoshi: stop

Ochako: no :))

Hitoshi: i'll use my quirk to make you embarrass yourself in front of tsu

Ochako: no u won't

Hitoshi: >:(

Ochako: you're too purehearted :)

Momo: We all know Hitoshi would never use his Quirk for any ill means, despite what he may say. :)

Izuku: wait why is hito here? does he have a crush on someone too???

Ochako: "too"

Izuku: stop it >:C

Hitoshi: NO i do NOT

Ochako: yes he does i heard present mic and aizawa sensei talking about it he has a crush on a boy from 1b

Hitoshi: DAD SAID HE WOULDN'T TELL

Ochako: he didn't say the name, he just slipped up and said he instead of they and said something about not harassing vlad king, and sensei knew what he meant immediately

Hitoshi: i hate my life :(

Izuku: wait so who is it???

Ochako: yeah who is it :)

Ochako: who is it toshi

Ochako: who is it who is it who is it

Fumikage: Perhaps we should back off and let Hitoshi become comfortable enough to tell us on his own.

Hitoshi: thank you

Fumikage: however, I suspect it is Monoma.

Hitoshi: FUCK YOU

Midoriya Izuku: heyyy momo?

Midoriya Izuku: sorry, I didn't want to put this in the other chat

Midoriya Izuku: but now that things are finally like, calming down? I need your help with something, and I know you can be trusted

The morning sun felt warm and calm on her skin, like an old friend enveloping her in a hug. She had spent so long confined to her room in the hospital, Rei had almost forgotten what it felt like to stand out in the grass, spread her fingers in the dirt, and soak in the earth. The wide brim of a straw hat shielded her eyes as she knelt in front of the neglected garden planters in front of Touya's home, arranging a few bulbs of her favorite flowers. She had transferred the one she kept in her room from its tiny little pot into the dirt already.

She hoped it didn't find the planter too big for itself and start to wither. It had lived so long in such a small, confined space, maybe it wouldn't know how to live in a larger world.

The day was a fine one. She had woken up and gone downstairs to make breakfast for Shouto, letting him sleep in since he had the day off before his final exam and last class of the year. She'd even delivered it to him on a tray, making him look adorably confused as he sat up in bed, and then she'd gone outside to try and stir up the makings of a garden. She'd bought a few vegetables, some flowers,

and a few strawberry bushes. A few had grown naturally at the estate, when they'd lived there, and Touya had so loved walking out with her in their sandals to pick them, always eating them before she could corral him into going back inside to wash them...

But, in truth, she felt listless. It made her heart ache to see her sons still in so much pain, even when things were getting better. She didn't know what she could do for them. Even after all this time, what had ailed her over the years was the same. What could she do? She couldn't soothe the sting that came from thinking of their father, she couldn't put a stop to their anguish... Rei was afraid that she couldn't do anything at all.

Deep down, she wished they had lived a different life. That they had parents who kept a home they could always return to, that she didn't have to rely so much on her oldest son, that he didn't have to take care of her when it should have been the other way around.

But they hadn't. She was left here, and she wasn't even sure what she was going to do with herself. It had been so long since she had worked- she'd barely been a young woman when she'd gotten married. She had finished her schooling, worked in an office for a little bit, but then she'd had children. She had refused to ever leave them alone, not with their home the way it was.

She supposed, now, all she could do to help them was to plant strawberries.

"Excuse me, madam," a cheerful voice began. She startled, but fortunately had already finished planting her last bulb, so she had nothing to drop. She turned to seek out where the voice had come from and found a man standing on the sidewalk leading up to the front door.

The first things she noticed were the softness of his face, the curliness of his hair. He sported a defined jaw, angular features, yet he had a sort of gentle expression to him, somehow. His hair looked soft to the touch, too, but fitting of a grown man, matching his eyes in color. He was dressed formally, in slacks and an overcoat over plain black shoes, but a bright red shirt and the shining gem of a bolo tie peeking out from under the coat's collar spoke to a bit of eccentricity. He was leaning on a short walking stick planted against the asphalt, which, in a way, made him look a bit old-fashioned. Even Rei's father had tried to avoid using a walking stick when he aged, convinced it would 'make him look old.'

"I'm terribly sorry if I startled you," he continued with a smile. "Would I be correct in assuming you are young Touya's mother...?"

The question jolted her out of her thoughts. "I'm sorry," Rei replied, mostly out of habit. "I am. Are you Touya's friend- the one from work?"

She had only heard a little bit about him, one such mention being when Shouto had referred to the man as 'Uncle Atsu' in such a deadpan manner it had to be specifically to make Touya twitch a little bit. Touya had come in late one night, muttering something about a 'Mister' making him go home early.

"That I am! Sako Atsuhiro. There is no need to be formal, however. May I address you as Rei?"

That's a little too forward, her mother would have said, all those years ago, and the little thought almost made Rei want to laugh, because the very same woman had signed her daughter away, even if it was under financial duress. Besides, it was a different time, people were friendly, or so Rei wanted to believe. Realizing she was still standing in the grass, she hurriedly crossed over to the walkway, slipping out of her gardening shoes and back into her house slippers. She hoped she didn't look too abashed as she began pulling off her gloves. "I'm so sorry, I'm being rude- would you like a drink, some water? Touya isn't here right now, but..."

Atsuhiro smiled at her as she dropped the gloves on the edge of the planter. "That's all right. I did come to see if he was around- I've been trying to hassle him into getting a painting for his living room, you see-" That felt as though it was an inside joke she couldn't yet understand. Atsuhiro extended his hand, the other holding a mildly ornate silver container. "But I was hoping you would be here as well; I was hoping to give you a welcome gift! Touya mentioned you drink tea."

Part of Rei's heart felt warmed by the fact that Touya had at least mentioned her, had spoken of her and something she liked, *didn't* hate her. She glanced down at the proffered hand and paused. He was holding it palm-up, not as if to shake, and after some hesitation she reached out to take it. She was out of practice of greeting people, *meeting* people; even little gestures felt unfamiliar.

Atsuhiro leaned down, only lifting her hand a tiny bit, and pressed a kiss to the back of her knuckles. Rei froze, for a brief moment, as a

flustered, abashed feeling she hadn't experienced for years reared up. Or experienced...ever, really. Her marriage hadn't been what one would call *romantic.* But...he was probably simply being polite. Even so...

"If it would be all right with you, I'd take you up on the offer for a drink," Atsuhiro told her as he straightened up, the smile still in place. "The tea is hibiscus-rose. I'd love to make some for you?"

"...of- course," Rei said, hurriedly affixing a smile to her own face before too much heat could flood into it. She turned to open the door for him, pausing when he motioned for her to let him do it instead.

She didn't quite have a *sense* for these things, anymore, but...if she had, she thought, she wouldn't mind if it was about a man this handsome.

Aizawa's eyes narrowed into a glare.

"*Vlad."*

"Eraser, for fuck's sake," Kan complained, his expression grumpy. He had just come into the staff room to file grades at his desk, despite it being a day off school; teachers never ran out of work. Without Yamada there to act as a buffer, though...he dared to say Aizawa was downright unbearable.

He would've called the man his friend, in most contexts, but ever since he found out his youngest brat had a thing for someone in Kan's class, he'd been watching him like a hawk.

"I don't know who little Hito likes, Eraser, or else I'd tell you."

"*Would* you, though?" Aizawa asked suspiciously, turning away from him to continue typing on his keyboard. He clacked each key hard enough it had to have been on purpose. Petty little shit.

"Maybe I wouldn't, if you'd start glaring at some poor kid in my class," Kan replied, just to be as equally petty. He got a glare in return out of the corner of Aizawa's eye.

"I wouldn't do anything unprofessional in regards to a student."

"No, of course not. He'd just be able to feel the death aura from across the building."

Aizawa's head whipped around. "So you *do* know who it is."

"No, your students just can't keep their traps shut," Kan continued to complain, sitting down and giving Yagi an expectant stare. So far, he'd just been staring into his own computer monitor like it held the secrets to the universe, shoulders bunched up near his ears. "Come on, don't you agree, All Might? Just because Aizawa's being an overprotective ass doesn't mean I got anything to do with it."

Yagi jumped like he'd shocked him with a goddamn taser. He coughed, slapping a hand over his mouth even though very little blood came out this time, looking like Kan had just asked him to walk up to meet his maker. "Oh, well, I, er, I don't have an opinion- I mean, of course- I mean, Aizawa-kun is valid in worrying...I mean-"

Kan rolled his eyes and set his papers down. Was he the only one who wasn't piss-scared to make Aizawa mad? His coworkers had even shared some tall tale about being held 'hostage' the previous day...were they Pro Heroes, or were they not? Sure, Eraser could be intimidating, but he was just one guy.

Yagi cut himself off to cough more severely into his hand. He may have gotten a lung back- or so Kan heard- but he was probably still getting used to it. The sound made Aizawa look up. Frowning, he reached over to his husband's desk, taking a pack of tissues from one of Yamada's drawers, and slid them across the line of tables to Yagi.

"Ah, thank you, Aizawa," the behemoth of a man wheezed out quietly, taking a few tissues to wipe his mouth in place of his handkerchief. Perhaps he'd stopped carrying it in the hopes he wouldn't need it. Kan found himself watching Aizawa as Aizawa watched Yagi, eyes carefully focused on his throat as he calmed down. "I'm all right. Thank you- well, thank you to Yamada-kun, I suppose, too."

"Where is Mic, anyway?" Kan asked, watching Aizawa go back to treating his computer like it had tried to mug him.

"He's out."

"Well, that's descriptive."

"We're buying a house," Aizawa intoned, not looking at him. "We need more room."

Kan raised an eyebrow. "You've only got one squirt living with you, don't you...?"

"Keigo, too, if he needs space, and we are adopting a daughter."

Yagi nearly started coughing again. He narrowly avoided a wheezing fit. "My, Aizawa, that is...fast...but it is sweet, that you are expanding your family as such..."

The fuck is up with this semester? Kan wondered, bewildered. *Shit hits the fan, and suddenly Eraser's dad extraordinaire.*

"I still think you're overreacting," he couldn't help but point out, relaxing back in his seat. *If he's this bad about his son, god help him when his daughter dates.* "How bad could it really be?"

Aizawa paused briefly to give him a withering stare. "Ninety percent of the time, first crushes and high school relationships break your heart."

"That's pessimistic. What was *your* first crush?"

Aizawa's expression darkened into something sour. "A mistake," he muttered tautly, making Kan pull a face.

Jeez. Okay. Maybe Eraser was talking from personal experience...then again, the man and his current *husband* were technically a high school relationship. But- on the flip side- well...Kan wouldn't bring that up. He knew Shirakumo was...a sensitive topic.

"Why don't you ask your *kid*?"

Aizawa's face twisted into...god, was he *pouting*? "He won't tell me," he nearly mumbled, the bags under his eyes all the more pronounced by the dull glow of his screen. "He ran out of the house this morning to buy discount yarn."

...okay, Kan thought, and sat silently with the acceptance that he would never understand the Aizawa family.

It was then someone made a colossally terrible decision, Kan would later reflect, because the door came busting open as both Kayama and Lunch Rush came inside in a flurry, looking like they'd made the discovery of the century. Like a fool, Kayama began speaking as soon as she saw him. "Kan, you won't believe it- that boy our little mini-Aizawa likes made him *cry*!"

For some reason, she sounded happy about it, and Kan couldn't fathom why; he also couldn't fathom why they'd both run here like

two gossiping students, Lunch Rush already panting with their hands on their knees, but then, he became aware of a dark, looming sensation towering over him. Confused, he turned, watching Kayama's expression drop when she saw who sat at the end of the row and realized that Aizawa was indeed *there*.

Kan's stomach turned into a dark, cold pit. Aizawa's hair was floating, seemingly caused by pure rage, because his Quirk hadn't yet activated as he slowly stood up. When he did turn, however, all Kan could see was two glowing red lights staring him down.

"Vlad," Eraser whispered, his expression wild with some kind of madness.

Then he lunged across the desk partition, like some kind of animal, not even bothering with his capture weapon as he reached for him with his bare hands.

Kan changed his mind.

He could see why people were scared.

Hitoshi wanted to die just a *little* bit.

He'd made up an excuse to get out of the house that morning, taking his sweet time coming to school, because what else did he have to do on a day off? He'd been planning to drop in on the indoor gym he knew Ochako and Momo snuck into to practice sparring, but he was waylaid by a loud, bright, blond annoyance he liked to call *the guy I think I like so bad it makes me want to vomit.*

Case in point, his stomach had been in his throat the entire time Neito had been speaking to him in the hall, smile sparkling as he went on and on.

"-and anyway, I *know* you'll absolutely ace your exam tomorrow, but I wanted to drop by and wish you good luck anyway- I know you'll do amazing, you're so talented, I know you'll place well and be well on your way to being an amazing hero- but here's a batch of cookies, it's my mother's recipe, everyone *loves* it, I assure you, they're famous in the neighborhood-"

Oh, but of course you came to get some extra training! You're so hardworking! Neito had said with a blinding expression, so intense he looked a little manic.

"Gee, thanks," Hitoshi had eventually managed to croak out, his throat dry as he put on a show of looking vaguely irritated and began to speed-walk away. In true Neito fashion, the blond hadn't noticed the fake annoyance and had just waved enthusiastically as he went.

I know you'll be an amazing hero.

He only got around one corner before a few tears began to dribble down his face. He clutched the container closer to him, pressing it against his abdomen, as his stomach did flips and turns. He didn't know what to do with someone who just...believed in him so wholeheartedly, so much he had no shame in literally screaming about it.

He heard a giggle as he caught sight of Midnight whipping around a corner, undoubtedly thinking the entire affair was cute, but he tried to ignore it. 'Auntie Nemuri' *thrived* on gossip. There was no shooing her once she found it.

He wandered aimlessly, absentmindedly taking a cookie out of the tin to bite into, for about ten minutes. He was just beginning to wonder if he should maybe knit Neito something to wear when a red streak flashed through the hallway in front of him. Confused, he turned to look after it, barely catching a glimpse of 1B's teacher before he went around another corner. Then *his* father went chasing after him, Quirk activated and looking like a demon out of hell, enraged voice echoing through the hallway so loudly Hitoshi felt like he could feel it in his skin. *"VLAD!"*

I'm just gonna leave that one alone, he thought, and altered his coarse to walk into a different part of the school.

"I want this one! I want this one!"

Hizashi smiled as he watched Himiko bounce up and down inside the small alcove in the bedroom they were touring. There was a tiny balcony outside, and she would probably use the windowseat to go outside more than the actual sliding door. She turned and gave him a wide grin. "It's perfect for catching things!"

"Is it? Like what?"

"Like birds," she said mysteriously, holding onto the knife Shouta had given her like it was some sort of comfort item. Hizashi had traded the sheathe out for one that disguised it, so they wouldn't scare anyone,

and she looked like she was holding a very fancy wand from some animated show Hitoshi watched in the dead of night when he couldn't sleep. Hizashi had gotten it as a gag gift, mostly, but Hitoshi had insisted he was *definitely* going to wear it with his real costume one day as a joke."Hawksy, is that cannibalism for you?"

"I'm gonna go with a hard no, even if birds of prey cannibalize things all the time," said Keigo from the hall. He had just climbed down from the attack, which was big enough to sleep in, and Hizashi had a great suspicion he would end up holed up there if they bought this house. "It's completely normal."

"Well," Hizashi went on, ignoring that particular line of questioning, "this one's a little expensive, but with that gift Yagi was nice enough to give us..."

"I have loads of money I don't use."

"I know, but parents don't take money from their kids, y'know."

Keigo wrinkled his nose, turning halfway red as he quickly turned and amused himself with fiddling with one of the pictures on the wall. Hizashi hid a smile.

"Good thing is, these people have already moved out, so we could probably move in fairly quickly. Maybe it could be a present for after Hitoshi's finals."

"Haha, you'll be taking finals next semester, Toga-"

"*Call me Himiiiiii,*" Himiko whined, spinning again and watching one of her new skirts flare out around her. Technically, she wasn't *entirely* supposed to be there, as Nedzu had only just started the process of regaining her identity and she was supposed to be at Yuuei in 'Pro Hero custody,' but Hizashi considered this to be in-custody too.

"-Himi," Keigo amended, poking his head in the door. He grinned. "You nervous?"

"I'm not nervous at all," Himiko insisted, turning her nose up. "School is easy. Plus I have Mei-chan to help me! Mei-chan is nice, and smart, and *reeeeally* pretty..." She trailed off, scrunching up her nose, and looked so confused Hizashi raised an eyebrow in question. "But Ochako-chan is *also* really pretty...I don't know which one I think is prettier!"

Hizashi barely hid his amusement. "Well, you can like more than one person," he chuckled, oblivious to how Keigo turned to stare at the wall with such laser focus it was as if it had personally spoken to him. "I liked two people in high school."

"Really?" Himiko turned to him with wide eyes, blinking a few times as if she wasn't sure she believed him. "You did? Was Mr. Eraserhead one of them?"

"He was! He liked me too. Both of them did, actually. Don't tell him I told you, though, he's under the impression I didn't know for a while." Hizashi wiggled his eyebrows, jokingly, and smiled again when she began to laugh. She twirled again, returning the wand to her belt, and when she turned back around there was again a contemplating look on her face. "What's the matter, princess?"

"Well...I was just wondering..." She steepled her hands and tapped her index fingers together, staring at the ceiling. "What do I call you...if you're gonna be my parents?"

Surprised, Hizashi reached over and settled a hand on her shoulder, prompting her to look at him. "Whatever you're comfortable with. Our names, or hero names, or...if you want, something like 'dad.'"

Her face turned so serious he was a little afraid she might have become upset about something, or was about to say she didn't want to do it at all. Then, "I dunno if I can call Mr. Eraserhead anything but Mr. Eraserhead..."

A short laugh escaped him. Hizashi put a hand over his eyes, nearly wheezing under his breath, and tried to imagine someone in an interview or press conference saying '*Mr. Eraserhead.*' "That's fine too."

"I think 'Mister' can mean dad too," Himiko continued brightly, sounding absolutely tickled. "That's what Dabi always calls Mr. Compress! He calls me a little vampire, and Shiggy a freak, and Jin a weirdo- I think they're nicknames, though- but he always says 'Mister' to Mr. Compress. It's his way of showing he cares!"

"Don't say that to him," Keigo put in, amused. "He may have an existential crisis if he realizes he sees anyone as a dad..."

"What," Dabi said, mildly aghast, as he stared at the scene before him. "The hell?"

"Touya, don't be rude," his mother giggled, *giggled*, at him. She was sitting at their dining table, chair turned out so she could face the man sitting beside her, who currently had one of her hands in one of his, as if he'd been holding it in the midst of conversation when Dabi walked in. There was a healthy color to her cheeks, a gentle smile on her face, and Dabi had quite literally *never* seen his mother look so...*like this*. "Atsuhiro brought some tea, would you like some?"

First name basis? What the fuck?

"Touya! It's good to see you," Atsuhiro said, smiling at him like this was all absolutely normal and a League member wasn't currently sitting in his house *talking* to his *mom* let alone doing...whatever it was that they were doing. "I came by to discuss the decor again. But your charming mother distracted me for quite a while, and I'm afraid I'm quite invested in the conversation-" Rei laughed under her breath again, and he placed his other hand over hers. What the fuck? What the *fuck?* Were they *flirting?* Right in *front* of him? "I'll have to make a suggestion later."

Normally, Dabi might have asked *is this about that stupid fucking painting you're obsessed with making me get?* because Sako was, indeed, obsessed, it seemed, with making him decorate his house, but all he could think of was a mental equivalent of a blue screen of death as his brain checked out. He came to several realizations at once, that were, in order, that he had never seen his mother look so happy in any other context but dealing with her children, that it might have been...*good*, for her to find someone, but that just made it even weirder, because it was *Compress,* and this was *weird*, but an entire villain was still managing to make her feel happier than his shitstain of a father had, and that brought to mind the fact that if his *mother* and *Compress* hooked up (*nononono bad thoughts*) that basically made Sako his *stepfather* and. Dabi didn't know if he had a problem with that.

"I need to take a nap," he said, faintly, and he turned and walked straight up the stairs while their goddamn flirty little giggles followed him.

He reached Shouto's room, where the door was open, and stopped when he saw his brother sitting at his desk, a schoolbook open but no work being done, as the boy was just sitting there with a cup of tea and slurping entirely too loudly as he took a drink. He turned and stared at him, expressionless, and lowered his cup to speak. "*Uncle Atsu* gave it to me."

Fuck my life, Dabi thought despairingly, and then fled to his room for solace.

Chapter End Notes

hope y'all catching these HINTS i'm slamming into my keyboard

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